

## Prologue

No one knows what it's like,  
To be the bad one,  
To be the sad one,  
Behind blue eyes.

Harry strolled down the centre of Diagon Alley with Ron, Hermione and Ginny two weeks after having left Hogwarts for the summer. He was finally going to get to see what his Triwizard Tournament winnings had bought for the twins. It had been a long summer for him already, his permanent bad mood was only worsened by the Dursley's behaviour and his lack of contact with his world.

The other three were chatting away about something, but Harry's thoughts were a million miles away as he stared at the cobbled pavement beneath his feet. Well not a million miles away, close by in fact, in the Ministry of Magic's Department of Mysteries.

The memory haunted him. The crumbling stone archway, the fluttering, ragged, black veil. The way it folded in as Sirius had fallen into it. The look of surprise on his face as he disappeared out of sight, never to return. Harry felt sick as his memory replayed in his head, there was so much he could have done, and didn't. He shouldn't have even been there in the first place, he'd gone there to save Sirius, and instead he'd drawn him to his death.

Ginny was arguing good naturally with Ron and was calling on him for his opinion.

"Oh," he said blankly, realising he hadn't heard a word they'd said for the past ten minutes, "I agree with Ron."

"The Canons are not going to win the League cup this year Harry!" ranted Ginny accusingly, "Surely the Magpies are going to win?"

"Oh, yeah, the Magpies, of course," said Harry, nodding his head, not particularly caring.

Ginny gave Ron and triumphant look and Harry returned to his thoughts. Whereas last year he had been constantly haunted by visions of the black door, now it was only the black veil. He had wondered in the dead of night having woken up from another nightmare, whether these were actually dreams or whether they were visions. Maybe it was Sirius trying to get in contact with him?

Harry knew in his heart that he was gone, but the overwhelming hope still existed inside him that he was trapped inside, waiting for Harry to come and get him. Sirius would know that Harry would be the only one whom he could rely on to help him, just like Sirius had always helped Harry...

Harry had found himself unconsciously planning ways in which he could re-enter the Department of Mysteries, how he would get into the room with the arch in it, how he could get Sirius back out. Luna had told him Sirius was inside the veil, all he had to do was reach in...

"Fancy an ice-cream Harry?" broke in Hermione's voice.

He looked up and realised with a jolt they were standing outside Florean Fortescue's, with Ron and Ginny already over by the counter.

"Yeah, sure..." he said in a faraway voice, "sure..."

"Are you ok Harry?" asked Hermione worriedly, "you've been awfully quiet since we picked you up."

"I'm fine," he lied with an unconvincing smile, "honestly, just a little tired...late night, revision, you know..."

Hermione nodded, understanding he was lying through his teeth and there was nothing she could do about it. They got their sundaes and sat down around the table, laughing and chatting in the bright sunlight that Harry couldn't feel or even acknowledge. Ever since he had come out of the Ministry he had just felt cold, numb, the only thing he could feel was this ache in his stomach...like a huge gaping hole that no amount of anything could ever fill.

"I'm surprised your mum let us come out on our own," said Hermione, her voice carrying into Harry's head from a long way away, "Especially now..."

"Oh, we're not alone," piped up Ginny as she fished around for the fudge piece at the bottom of her glass, "Tonks is over there, see the old woman watching us in the reflection of the Apothecary, she's wearing our favourite nose Hermione. I'm also pretty sure I saw Mundungus over there, as well as a few new guys I don't recognise that have been trailing us since we left the Leaky Cauldron."

This broke Harry out of his reverie and he looked up sharply and took in the figures that Ginny had pointed out, dotted across the street. Sure enough an old woman was watching them in the reflection of a window, and the nose was familiar from meals at Grimauld Place last year. He looked across to Ginny in surprise, she sure must be observant to have spotted all that, Harry hadn't even noticed who he had been walking with, let alone the hidden Aurors.

"I guess mum must want us to think we still have some freedom," shrugged Ginny, scraping out her glass and noticing they were still staring at her.

"What?" she asked indignantly.

"How did you notice them?" asked Harry blankly, they were trained Aurors after all.

"We've all got to watch our backs now," she told him with a haunted look in her eyes.

He nodded and stared down glumly at his sundae. He had eaten about two mouthfuls but didn't feel hungry at all now...in fact he felt quite sick. All he wanted to do was return home and sleep. No he lied; all he wanted to do was turn back the clocks.

He prayed with every fibre of his being that he could go back to that evening of his History of Magic exam when he'd had his 'vision'. He wished so much it hurt that he had gone to Snape and told him, that he'd known about and used the mirror that Sirius had given him, that

he'd checked Grimauld Place for Sirius and not just believe the word of traitorous Kreacher.

All these things he could have done, but hadn't.

Sirius shouldn't have come after him and he shouldn't have gone in the first place. He should have been able to handle it by himself - who was he kidding? He'd been teaching DA for half a year in the hope of showing everyone how they could defend themselves as he had, but for what? He wasn't a teacher, he wasn't an Auror, and he should never have got ideas above his station. He couldn't protect himself any more than Neville could, and he could protect his friends even less. Everything he did seemed to bring them one step closer to Voldemort, one step closer to death.

He would rather have thrown himself into that veil than have Sirius go through it.

It was then that out of the corner of his eye he saw a great hulking black shadow. He almost cracked his neck by the speed of which he turned around to look at it, hope exploding in his chest like a rapidly inflating balloon.

"Sirius!" Harry yelled hoarsely, immediately leaping from his chair.

There was the sound of crashing furniture and smashing glass and Harry desperately push through the sea of tables, people shouting loudly at him as he pushed them aside.

"SIRIUS!" yelled Harry even louder, chasing after the long black tail he could just about make out through the crowd.

He could hear Ron shouting his name and Hermione and Ginny running after him, as he threw aside people, still desperately shouting out Sirius's name - he couldn't hear him with all that noise! Harry felt like his head was about to explode - he knew Sirius was ok, he'd just known his Godfather wouldn't have given up on him like that. Sirius was indestructible, one little curse like that, it was laughable, he should have known it wouldn't stop his Godfather looking after him.

He was frantically pushing through the crowd, which was now drawing back, whispering in fright at the supposed mass-murderer being identified in Diagon Alley. He could see the dog's hindquarters now, it's back....Harry yelled his name once again and the dog turned around, dragging its owner who was holding the lead with him.

Harry felt as if all the air had been knocked out of his lungs. Like he'd fallen from a great dizzying height onto solid concrete.

It wasn't Sirius.

It didn't even look anything like him.

Somewhere outside the crushing pain he was feeling he was aware of people whispering, the crowds watching him in puzzlement and the various Order members closing in. All of this however took a backseat to the utter feeling of loss and grief that had overtaken him. It felt like he'd lost Sirius all over again, for a few brief seconds he had been ok, he had been alive.

Somehow he had ended up on his knees and with a shaking hand he reached out and stroked the dog's thick black fur feeling the hole in his stomach, that ever present ache cracking open even wider, swallowing him up.

"Sirius," he whispered hollowly as the dog began to lick his hand.

In the background he could hear the curious whispers of the crowd, the dog's owner demanding loudly what was going on, the sound of Hermione trying to explain. Somebody placed a comforting hand on his arm, which was still stroking the dog slowly.

"Come on Harry," said the voice softly, with a trace of anxiety hidden away in its depths.

He suddenly snapped out of it, dropping his arm to his sides and allowing his eyes to come back into focus. Climbing hastily to his feet he looked over to the owner and gave him a smile that held no humour.

"Sorry, case of mistaken identity I think," he said, before stepping backwards and pushing his way through the crowds.

"Harry!" came Hermione's voice as three pairs of feet scurried to catch up with him, "wait up! Please, Harry -."

However, he had reached the looming presence of Kingsley Shacklebolt, who was looking down at him with a very thoughtful, calculating expression.

"I'd like to go home now," he told him in his most authoritative voice.

"Follow me then," came the deep rumble of a voice.

Harry began to walk after him.

"Harry!" called Ginny's voice from behind him.

"Where are you going?" asked Hermione, there was the suspicion of tears in her voice.

He strode away silently, Kingsley looking down at him out of the corner of his eyes.

"Harry!" yelled Ron.

They passed Tonks who was looking sombre faced. Harry tried to gulp down the lump in his throat trying to rid the image of the black dog from in front of his eyes. He resisted the urge to push a hand onto his chest, to stop the feeling that his soul was being torn from his body. An Order member he didn't recognise became his second guard as they walked towards the archway to Diagon Alley, leaving Ron, Hermione and Ginny standing uncertainly in the middle of the street, watching him go in confusion.

When he finally reached the freshly painted front door of Number Four Privet Drive, he thanked his guards and let himself in quietly. Stowing the key away in his pocket he made towards the stairs.

"Is that you Dudley?" came his Uncle's shout from the living room.

Harry paused on the stairs, before trudging on up in answer. When he got to his room he locked the door and flopped onto the bed, burying his head n his pillows and not moving again, mind full of the Grim he had just seen and how once again it had brought death in its wake.

A/N:

I know it's short, but it does get bigger, better and longer! New characters promised and something of a bit of a twist on your average Harry Potter sequel! Please read, review and keep updated!

## Chapter One

No one knows what it's like,  
To be hated,  
To be fated,  
To telling only lies.

The plan had arrived in his mind fully formed, the intricacies of it were already worked out as he woke up the next morning, face full of creases from the pillow he'd lay on all night in the same position. Pulling himself into a sitting position he pulled his limbs out of their stiffness and rubbed his eyes experimentally, mind already whirring to life, whipping up a frenzy of information, strategies, ideas, memories. It was almost too easy.

He watched the cold light on his wardrobe, face showing the dawning understanding, the realisation of the way forward, a new hope. He finally flicked his eyes up to the calendar tacked to the wall, September the first ringed in red, stars every three days showing when Order members would visit the house, sit through a strained cup of tea before leaving again. He was due a visit today he noted, feeling the kindling of excitement in his stomach, a foreign feeling to him now that left him almost angry with himself. Sirius is gone, and you're feeling excited his mind screamed at him.

He shook his head and climbed to his feet, looking around the small room that was still cluttered with Dudley's rejects. Instead of hating his prison, now he surveyed it with the excitement even his alter ego couldn't rid him of. A whole room full of salvageable trinkets, everything had its use.

"HARRY!" shrieked his aunt's voice suddenly, causing him to give a massive start.

He hurried onto the landing and looked over the banister, "Yes?"

"Tidy yourself up," she said impatiently; flapping up at him with a pair of marigolds, "they'll be here in ten minutes."

"Yes Aunt Petunia," he said wearily, already traipsing back to his room.



"And comb your hair!" came her yell from the kitchen.

Harry snorted to himself when his door was safely closed, not one of the Order members would be fooled by a head of combed hair or newly ironed clothes. Nevertheless he changed his clothes from those he'd been into bed in, pulling on a pair of his newly shrunk Dudley jeans and a thick jumper, it was unusually cold out and the heating had been protesting loudly. Not nearly as loudly as his Uncle to the plumbers he thought dryly and he surveyed himself in the mirror, not liking the pale face that stared back, or the dark smudges under each eye. He sighed and turned his gaze away from himself and sat down at his desk with a thump. He stared unfocussed at the scraps of parchments on its top, postal order forms for the Daily Prophet, The Quibbler and his latest acquisition Balls, a Quidditch bi-monthly the twins had introduced him to. They thought he may have appreciated the range of blonde witches draped languidly on different brooms. He gave a small smile, trust the twins.

He couldn't hold the feeling long, sensing the piece of parchment that lay under them all staring up at him. One of his last letters from Sirius. With fingers that obeyed no instruction from the rest of him, he pulled it out, staring for a long time at the signature at the bottom. He felt the ache in his stomach grow again, the pain eating him away. All he could think about was the fact he'd never see him again, never hear his lighthearted banter with Professor Lupin, never see his serious side as he explained to Harry about the latest part of Voldemort's plan, never see him angry at Mrs Weasley for mothering him. Never again.

"Harry?" came a voice that broke him out of this reverie.

He looked over his shoulder to see the worn face of Remus Lupin looking around the doorway, "Can I come in?"

"Sure," said Harry, finding himself unable to slide the letter away from him, he needed to keep it in reach, where he could feel it.

"How are you?" asked Remus once he sat on the edge of Harry's bed, "Tonks told me about yesterday in Diagon Alley."

"I'm fine," said Harry, attempting to slowly push the letter away, as if to limit the suddenness that would come from dropping it.

"Do you want to talk about it?" he asked gently, fixing him with a particularly searching stare.

"No, I'm fine," he said in his best, most normal voice he could muster, "I was just being stupid, didn't have much sleep the night before...so, you know."

He gave a helpless shrug, finally letting go of the letter.

"Hermione said you left pretty sharpish," he prodded and Harry couldn't help but begin to feel angry at the man sitting in front of him. Remus knew Harry wouldn't want to talk to him, but he was still pushing.

"I realised I had to be back here for dinner," said Harry tersely, fingers closing around one of the random scraps of parchment.

"I see," he mused, watching as Harry began to rip the piece of paper to shreds, "they're very worried about you, you know. Keeping things bottled up won't help you Harry, you've got to -."

"I know," cut in Harry angrily, "you've told me all this before."

"Then you must understand that I'm telling it you for your own good," said Remus, batting away Harry's anger.

"Yeah everyone does stuff for my own good," he said bitterly, climbing to his feet and messing with the papers on his desk, hoping to stop Remus's imminent lecture from beginning.

"Harry, I understand how you must be feeling," he begun and Harry rolled his eyes.

"No you don't," he said, much more harshly than he'd intended.

"Sirius was my best friend for 24 years," he said flatly, "I think I do."

Harry didn't say anything for a while, continuing to shuffle the papers. The silence was deafening and Harry wished Remus would just take offence like any normal person and leave him alone.

"We're beginning to get very worried about you Harry," said the man eventually and Harry stared at the wall in front of him.

"Why, I'm perfectly fine," he replied after a few moments, "I just don't really feel like being chatty and pretending that nothing's happened."

"Your friends are just trying to make you feel better Harry."

"Well they can't, ok?" yelled Harry suddenly, fists balled up at his sides as he whipped around to Remus, "nothing they can do or say is going to change the fact that Sirius is gone and it's all my fault! So just tell them not to bother - I don't want to be around them and they don't want to be around me, so will you all just stop plaguing me and leave me alone!"

Any other person would have been angered by his outburst and lack of gratitude, but Remus merely sighed heavily and climbed to his feet. Harry was breathing deeply, the anger and the pain rushing through his veins, forcing him to turn back to the wall.

"I'm sorry you feel like that Harry," said Remus slowly, walking towards the door, "I'll be along in three days time to check in on you."

Harry wanted to yell 'don't bother' to the man, but found his throat was too tight to speak, he reached for the letter, his lifeline, and clung onto it tightly.

Remus knocked on the front door of Number 12 Grimauld Place and waited patiently, head still full of his earlier meeting with Harry. He heard Mrs Black shrieking in the corridor and realised it must be Tonks answering. Sure enough a few seconds later the door was wrenched open and a blue haired girl stuck her head around the corner, grinning widely and inviting him in.

Once they were in the corridor Remus tried unsuccessfully to calm Mrs Black, trying desperately to block out her curses from his mind,

thinking to himself that Sirius would be so angry that she was still about.

"How is he?" asked Tonks quietly as she headed towards the kitchen.

Her hair had slowly changed to black in mark of the sombre mood Remus seemed to be in and as she entered the kitchen he gave a heavy sigh.

"I don't know," he finally said, dropping into one of the chairs, "he's very angry..."

"Really?" said Tonks, sounding quite surprised, "at Diagon Alley he was so...I don't even know the word to describe it...anger was not featuring there anyway."

"Well you must be used to Harry's mood swings by now," said Remus, gratefully accepting the tea she placed in front of him, "he was just getting angrier and angrier with me - all I tried to do was understand, offer support or guidance..."

"Remus," began Tonks uneasily, before sliding into the seat next to him, "I don't think you should do things like that. Have you thought that Harry might see it like you're trying to replace Sirius, you know, trying to become the guiding figure..."

"But I'm not," he said, sounding quite anguished for a second, "I just want him to know that although Sirius might be gone, it doesn't mean he's alone now...I want to be part of his life like Lily and James intended but he doesn't seem to want me..."

"It's the wrong time to be trying to remake ties like that Remus," said Tonks softly, as if trying to limit the amount of damage her sentence may cause, "the time will come when he'll appreciate you, turn to you even, but it's not right now. Sirius has only been gone for less than a month, what he needs now is time and space..."

"Perhaps you're right," said Remus heavily, pinching the bridge of his nose wearily, "I should probably tell Dumbledore what's going on..."

"Ok," said Tonks, getting up with him as he walked over to the floo network, "I'll see you later on this evening I guess, Molly's coming over to cook us dinner?"

"Yes perhaps," he replied, knowing already he wouldn't come, "good bye."

Tonks gave him a small wave and then he was gone. She turned back to the empty kitchen and scowled at it, she hated being stuck in this place when there was nobody about. This place felt as much a prison as Sirius had described and she couldn't imagine what he felt knowing that he couldn't even go outside, no wonder he turned to the bottle. She let her memories rest on Sirius for a while longer before she squared her shoulder and walked down the corridor, wiping her eyes as she went.

"Right let's see what we can do about you," she said, staring at the curtains covering Mrs Black with a determined look in her eye.

It was approaching midnight and Harry gently pulled open his window, being careful not to create any shadows or sound. He raised himself to his elbows and looked over the window ledge into the back garden. Slowly reaching for his luminous clock he watched the seconds tick away until it was 11:54:47. If his calculations were correct in around thirteen seconds time there should be a-

Crack

He grinned to himself, slowly easing the window shut and creeping hunch backed over to his desk. He pulled out a piece of parchment that had a complicated looking table drawn up. Picking up his biro, he travelled down the 'Mundungus' column, finding the 'Monday' line and carefully wrote 11.55pm. He'd calculated that there were always two guards on the house, one at the front, one at the back, and the ever random wanderings of Mrs Figg. Every four nights Mundungus was on duty, and Harry had noted that on every single occasion he had left duty 5 minutes early. This, he later realised, coincided with the docking times of large consignments of potions at the Floo Station in London. Obviously Mundungus had a little business to attend to of his own.

Like clockwork, grinned Harry to himself, looking along his column. Friday was his day, his window of opportunity.

From the room next door Harry heard Dudley give another great hacking cough that set Harry's teeth on edge. Dudley had been in bed a day already with the flu, unnatural for this time of the year but brought on by the strange weather he guessed. But although Harry was kept awake by the snoring at night, he didn't mind, this was actually of huge benefit to his plan.

In the five minutes he had until his next guard came along, Harry leant of his window, and using the snooker cue that he'd found on top of the wardrobe, prodded Dudley's window open as far as it would go. Grinning to himself and feeling slightly wicked, he crawled back into his bedroom, and it wouldn't hurt to keep Dudley sick for the next few days. An open window in the chill of the night would see to that.

## Chapter Two

But my dreams,  
They aren't as empty,  
As my conscience seems to be.

The next morning Harry awoke, plan ever present in his mind. His nights sleep seemed to have worked out the coming day down to an impressive amount of detail. He went downstairs and got a piece of toast, smiling inwardly as his Aunt moaned to his Uncle about Dudley's flu getting worse overnight, especially hen his Uncle was accused of leaving the windows open in his room. For once they didn't even suspect Harry, they knew, quite rightly, that Harry had never even been in his room.

Uncle Vernon quickly left for work, swinging his suitcase importantly and fiddling with his tie and Aunt Petunia made him clear away the breakfast table while she took Dudley his breakfast, a dinner tray loaded down with the full English breakfast swimming on so much grease Harry was surprised he didn't need a spoon to eat it.

Harry was just doing the washing up when he caught sight of Tonks walking past the fence at the bottom of the garden disguised as a middle aged woman. She gave him a cheery wave and after a few moments he gave her a half hearted nod of the head, the smile slipped off her face and she gave him a worried look.

"I don't want you under my feet today do you hear me?" came his Aunt's piercing voice a few moments later right beside his ear making him jump, "I'm shampooing the carpets and I don't want you traipsing muck everywhere."

"Ok," sighed Harry, wiping his hands on the tea towel.

For a moment his aunt looked surprised he wasn't arguing with her as he would have done last year, but the expression was soon wiped off as she caught him looking outside still. Tonks had disappeared sharpish but Harry was sure his Aunt knew who he was looking for, she must have realised the house was under constant watch. She turned her sour gaze to him, lips pursed tightly. He turned away

silently and went upstairs moving quickly into action, he could hear his Aunt moving into the lounge and turning the George on, above the din Harry raced around, gathering supplies.

Just as he was diving into the recesses of the wardrobe he heard a tapping at the window. He straightened up and looked out, suspicious to see an unfamiliar owl there. He pulled the letter off the bird's leg and let it drink from Hedwig's dish before scrutinising the letter - it was from Hermione.

Dear Harry,

I didn't really know how to write this letter so I'll just say what's on my mind. I'm very worried about you, we all are. The other day at Diagon Alley was a big shock I know, and I can understand why you thought what you did. But you shouldn't have left like that, we wouldn't have thought any less of you and we could have helped you get past it. That's why we're here you know, friends are supposed to support each other, good times and bad.

Please talk to me ok? Sirius's death has been hard for you I know, it's been hard for all of us. But we're going to get through it, together. We'll always stick by you, no matter what. Please write back and tell me your ok,

Love Hermione

Harry dropped the letter to his knees, feeling torn between two conflicting emotions. He felt ashamed, that he was willing to give up Ron and Hermione to save himself, that he was going to leave them to their fate while he was going to get out. They didn't have the option of escaping now. But he also felt anger, anger at her words that it had been hard for all of them, as if Sirius's death was affecting them in even a quarter as it was affecting him. They didn't know, they didn't understand what it was like. They had only ever had to duel for their lives once, once and they'd all escaped unhurt, they hadn't even been there - seen Sirius fall backwards. It's not like their parents had been taken away from them, it wasn't like they'd had to endure 16 years of the Dursley's, it wasn't as if they'd lost the closest thing they'd ever get to a father. They couldn't even see Threstrals!



So how are they say they understand, how dare they been upset! They haven't seen anything yet!

Harry was suddenly aware he was scrunching up Hermione's letter in his shaking fist and he tried to release the pressure, unclenching his teeth and relaxing his shoulders. When he felt like he'd properly got his emotions under control he tossed the letter onto his desk and turned to survey the room.

He walked over to the window and fixed the nets of the curtain so that they obscured the view into the room, then placed his pillows and a couple of old school robes under his quilt, trying to make it look like a sleeping lump before dimming the lamp. Then he pulled on a pair of unaltered Dudley jeans and a few tee shirts, before pulling on another three jumpers. He was getting uncomfortably hot as he picked up his dress robes and shoved them under his jumpers. He regarded himself critically in the mirror - he didn't look fat, he just looked lumpy. Looking around the room thoughtfully he had a sudden idea, diving into the wardrobe and pulling out a black coat. After throwing it on he looked much more natural, all that was left was to pull a woolly hat over his black hair. Feeling quite proud of himself, Harry folded a few notes of muggle money into his pocket and crept out onto the landing, backpack on shoulders.

In a sudden flash of inspiration he headed towards the room when Dudley was lying comotosed, intent on getting something he could carry t make him look definitely muggle - a walkman perhaps. He pushed the door open silently and looked inside, Dudley was definitely asleep, the snoring was testament to that. He stayed on the threshold, looking around the room, it was crammed with gadgets and clothes, CD's lay all over what was probably meant to be a desk, clothes across the floor and a stack o videos and DVD's almost as tall as he was stood in one corner. He almost forgot what he came for in light of so much stuff, how could one person own so much junk he wondered vaguely. He looked around for Dudley's walkman before his eyes clapped on something much, much better.

Dudley's mobile phone.

Harry reached in and silently removed it from the stand, shutting the door and slipping it into his pocket self-consciously. He liked the feeling of weight as it lay in his pocket he decided before leaning over the banister and listening to his Aunt. The noise would be more than enough to cover his exit and he began to feel the familiar rush of excitement his adventures used to give him as he crept stealthily down the stairs. When he got to the front door he pulled his woolly hat down over his forehead, tucked in his hair and pulled off his glasses, stowing them in his pocket. He glanced quickly into the mirror in the hall, smiling at how ridiculous he looked, exactly like Dudley.

With a gulp he reached towards the door handle, expecting a shrill scream at any moment of his aunt or the crack of an apparating Order member who'd been spying on him. The door swung open and there was nothing, he stepped across the threshold, nothing. He passed the garden fence, onto Privet Drive before heading down Wisteria Walk - nothing. He was about to congratulate himself on a job well done when he became aware of a set of footfalls behind him. His heart sped up but he continued on his way, concentrating on mimicking Dudley's rolling gait, kicking a coca cola can along for a bit before slipping out the mobile phone. He pretended to dial a number and began chatting quietly to the silent phone.

As soon as he reached the bus stop he leant nonchalantly against the shelter and checked the coast, it was clear. He could see Tonks middle aged woman walking back towards the house and the 93 bus coming into view. All around him the old ladies were pulling out their bus passes, slowly pulling themselves out of the seats and waving their arms hopefully at the bus, which pulled into the bay. Harry let them all get on first before stepping on. He'd never caught a muggle bus before, Aunt Petunia always turned her nose up at public transport that was used by those 'common working class types', so it was time for a bit of guesswork.

"You heading into town?" he asked the bus driver in his best impersonation of a local teenager like those of Dudley's gang.

"Isn't that what the sign says?" asked the old man grumpily, grimacing at Harry.

"Return please," he said, holding his breath.

The man punched a few numbers into his machine and out popped a ticket.

"Two ten," said the guy and Harry pulled out a five pound note and slapped it on the tray.

"You not got the change?" asked the man as Harry shook his head, "fine, fine..."

He grumbled away, counting out Harry's change purposefully slowly and Harry tried to check it, squinting through his bad eyes wishing he could put his glasses back on. He finally walked down the aisle and the driver sped off, leaving Harry to career down the bus and fall into his seat with a thump. The girl who was sitting next to him gave him an evil glare and tried to shuffle along. Harry gave her an apologetic smile before settling back. If his memory served him it would take about twenty minutes to get into town from where they were and it would be another ten minutes before he dared to begin to dismantle his disguise.

He pulled off the stupid woolly hat, his hair falling everywhere, even more out of control than usual. He pushed it into the backpack, before putting his glasses on, allowing the world to flood back into focus. After unzipping his jacket he began to take the jumpers off, stuffing them all into the bag until he could breath more easily and felt he wasn't melting away.

"Cold out?" asked the girl next to him suddenly.

Harry looked at her for a few seconds, surprised she was talking to him, before realising he should perhaps answer back.

"Warmer than I thought," he said, throwing the scarf into the bag.

"You looked ready for the Antarctic," she said, smiling at him a lot more friendly than when he'd first boarded the bus.

"Yeah well, you know the English weather," he gave a shrug and she gave a laugh.

He turned back to the bag, forcing everything in and zipping it up, trying to look around and figure out where he was. Dudley's phone went off twice but Harry left it alone for fear of deleting some important message that would give his robbery of it away. After another few minutes he became aware that the girl was watching him closely when he wasn't looking and he felt the first prickle of suspicion. This went on for another few minutes before he turned to her and gave her a challenging look.

"Sorry," she said instantly but still staring at him, "but I feel like I know you from somewhere..."

The suspicion turned to anxiety now, she knew him, she must be from a magical family, a Daily Prophet reader maybe. He tried to flatten his fringe against his forehead and the girl watched him, clearly deeply thoughtful. Her eyes followed his movements until her face suddenly lit up in recognition and Harry's heart sank.

"Is it...Harry?" she said, sounding shocked, "Harry Potter right?"

He thought about denying it but she'd obviously seen his scar and you couldn't mistake that. He looked around desperately; his plan had crashed to the ground at the first hurdle, so much for incognito.

"Yeah, that's right," he said slowly, getting ready to have to stop whatever she was going to say next.

"It's me, Kitty," she said, hand on her chest as her eyes lit up in excitement, "Catherine Earl, remember? We went to St Paul's together? I used to put glue in your hair in arts and crafts!"

"Kitty?" he asked incredulously.

It was Harry's turn to study her closely now, gaping slightly in shock of seeing a girl that had changed beyond all recognition. She was a lot taller and obviously a lot more older and more grown up than the last time he'd seen her, but still quite obviously the same old Kitty.

She had wild dark hair, which was twisted into dreadlocks and piled into an ungainly bun on top of her head and was regarding him with electric blue eyes alight with excitement. He finally guessed he ought to say something else, trying to get his brain back into gear.

"I thought you moved away to Birmingham or something?" he asked her in confusion.

"Yeah I moved with my mom when my parents divorced," she explained, grinning widely at the encounter, "but she was offered a job in America so I'm staying with my aunt for a while now."

"Wow," said Harry, feeling quite speechless from this blast from the past, "I can't believe I bumped into you, small world..."

"Tell me about it, I haven't seen you for like 8 years or something," she said excitedly, before realising how she sounded and trying to appear more demure, "what have you been doing with yourself? Stonewall I guess?"

"No, got myself packed off to boarding school," he explained, a pang in his heart as he thought about Hogwarts.

"Oh really, bad luck man. You lived with your Aunt and Uncle right?" she had a frown on her face now and Harry couldn't help smile dryly.

"Yeah, it was a blessing really, I hated living here and my schools brilliant," he explained, feeling the knife twist in his heart a little more.

Hogwarts, once the shelter from the pain of living with the Dursley's now only reminded him of even worse times. Nothing good had ever come from living there, only near death experiences and loss.

"Well its Stonewall for me now I guess," she said, not a trace of enthusiasm left in her voice now, "I'll have to retake my GCSE modules from last year, flunked out of my old school."

"Oh, sorry to hear that," said Harry, feeling very sorry to think of someone like Kitty stuck in a hellhole like Stonewall, "I'm not going back to my school this year either."

"Oh no, why not?" she asked him sympathetically.

Harry racked his brains trying to think of a way he could dig himself out of the hole he'd just created for himself and she regarded him curiously.

"Ran out of money," he blurted out, before testing the theory in his head and liking it, "fees are too high."

"Shame, what you gonna do now?" she asked him.

He shrugged and she frowned slightly, before dropping it. He was silent for a few moments, he'd told her a lot more than he'd intended too, or than was smart and she obviously knew something strange was going on.

"Do you want to go get a McDonalds or something when we get into town? You know, catch up or whatever," she asked him suddenly.

He had every intention of saying no, he didn't have the time and he'd already made too many mistakes but found his mouth replying yes a lot quicker than he could stop himself.

"Brilliant," she said, looking quite relieved, "hey look, here's our stop."

Harry stepped off the bus and walked towards the town centre with Kitty whose sunny disposition seemed to blot out some of the pain he was carrying around with him. While they ate their McDonald and she rambled on about things Harry had no clue about like music and films he tried to figure out what it was. Why being with this complete stranger would make the loss of Sirius a little easier to handle, make his plan a little more realistic. He finally realised that maybe it was because she was a complete stranger. She had no connection to the magical world, she knew him only as Harry Potter, boy who sat next to me in arts and crafts when we were little rather than Harry Potter, Boy-Who-Lived, Gryffindor Seeker, Nutcase. Everyone he cared about now was so intricately woven into this mass of pain, of war and evil that it had become part of their everyday life, there wasn't one person he knew who wasn't connected to Voldemort in some way

now. And here was Kitty, sitting in the middle of a fast food restaurant chatting about how she much preferred horror movies to comedy.

"Anyone can slip on a banana peel and make it look amusing, can't they? What's that got to do with real life?"

He wanted to just tell her how lucky she was, shake her and tell her he wished more than anything he could have had her life, that Voldemort would be nothing more than an odd name to him, that his apparent destiny wasn't to be a murderer. Harry's stomach gave a horrible lurch and for a second he thought he was going to lose his McChicken sandwich. He tried never to think about the Prophecy but when he did it made him sick to his stomach because whenever he thought of that he thought of the Department of Mysteries, the Veil, Sirius...

"Hey, Harry? You ok?" came Kitty's voice, breaking him from his reverie.

"What?" he asked, feeling slightly spaced, "yeah, sure, I'm fine."

"You just looked a bit...upset?" she asked before noticing his expression.

She picked up the box her meal came in and pulled something out, regarding it critically.

"Ok, so I know it looks slightly like some kind of innocent woodland animal that got mangled in a paint factory, but am I reliably informed that it is some kind of child's toy," she said handing it to him, "may it give you happy dreams."

Harry grinned as he took the toy and studied it for a few seconds, "That is quite horrifying," he said as she began to giggle, "If I was give that as a child I'd be scarred for life! No one has ever given me something so terrifying before, thanks."

"No problem," she laughed, "glad I can keep the therapists of a fine country in work."

Harry gave the first genuine laugh he'd felt for many weeks as he watched Kitty trying to chase the last of her milkshake out of the cup with the straw with loud slurps. She looked over to him with a mischievous smile that put him in mind of the twins and he couldn't help but grin back. He desperately tried to think of the last time he'd done something so normal, so lighthearted, without having to worry about guards or protecting himself or possible attacks. He didn't think it'd ever happened to him before.

"So what's your plan for the day?" she asked him, plucking the toy lightly from his fingers and beginning to mess around with it.

"New eyes," said Harry, laughing at the way her eyes bulged slightly.

"I'm sorry?" she spluttered incredulously.

"Contacts," he replied rolling his eyes, "sick of these things."

He pushed his glasses up his nose slightly and took a sip of his own drink.

"You wouldn't be you without your glasses though Harry," she said with a smile, "that and that hair of yours."

"Exactly," he said, popping a chip into his mouth.

"Tonks, can you hear me?"

Tonks smiled to herself and lifted her inner wrist to her mouth, "Loud and clear, sneak up on me why don't you?"

"What's happened over there?" barked the voice again, obviously not in any mood for chit chat.

"Harry's been in the kitchen, got some breakfast, ate it in his room then went back to sleep," she said in a bored sounding voice, staring at Harry's window which was still dark.

"Again? That boy is so lazy, if I were in charge of him I'd have him -" began the gruff voice before Tonks cut him off.



"What Moody, have him doing stretches?" she asked, scratching her nose absentmindedly.

He gave a mutter of irritation that sounded distinctly like 'subordination' but he didn't continue with his rant.

"Any visitors to the house?" he began again.

"Milkman at 8am, postman at 9am," she said, peering through the bushes again, "Dursley left at 8.30am, she's washing the carpets and Dudley's gone a-waddling down the street, I think he must be in town."

"Right," said Moody, apparently satisfied with her thoroughness but irritated that he didn't have anything to reprimand her on, "keep up the work, report back to HQ as soon as you've finished."

"Aye aye cap' in," muttered Tonks into her wrist, causing Moody to mutter even more before she closed the connection.

She shifted the cloak around her shoulders and tried to find a comfier patch of dirt, performing another quick sweep of the area for magical signatures. Nothing but Dumbledore's charms on the house, the guard at the front and Mrs Figg's background hum from her various gadgets and gizmos in her house. She sighed deeply; she'd almost wish for a bit of action if it meant she could get up and rub some life back into her numb bum.

The McDonalds ended sooner than Harry found himself wanting and they headed out onto the High Street. It was thronged with crowds of shoppers and Harry turned to face Kitty, aware this was probably goodbye.

"So," he began awkwardly, shifting his bag on his shoulder

"So indeed. I'm off to see a man about a dog," she said with a grin, looking around the crowds, "so I guess this is it - the last waltz, the big goodbye."

"I guess so," said Harry, feeling almost sad about it.

"Lets not let it be another eight years eh?" she laughed, "God, we'll be like, 23 then - scary thought."

"Yeah," he agreed, the sudden painful thought coming to him that he probably wouldn't even live to see that birthday.

"So, see you around Harry," she said, surprising him by pulling him into a quick hug.

"See you around Kitty," he replied, watching her turn away and wander off into the crowd.

He stood rooted to the spot, watching her crazy hair bob and weave out of sight with an unnamed feeling coming over him. The darkness and pain that seemed to have disappeared during the time he'd been with her started creeping in. He sighed and turned away thinking about everything he'd told her; that he wouldn't be going back to school this year - he never wanted to go back. Hogwarts was no longer the home he could get lost in, marvelling at the magic of the place as the suits of armour wandered round and the paintings insulted you. No, now Hogwarts seemed to him to be a prison, looming ahead of him, a place he'd be dragged back to, put through all manner of humiliations and tests, taught to fight. He knew that Dumbledore would be preparing him for the destiny the prophecy had in store for him and he didn't want it - there was no way he could fight against the Dark Lord, he'd seen him battle with Dumbledore in the Ministry of Magic, he couldn't compare to that.

"Big Issue mate?" came a voice next to him and Harry startled.

"Sorry?" he said, looking at the man who had a magazine thrust in front of his face and a small mangy dog at his ankles.

"Big Issue? £1.20 to help the homeless?" asked the guy, grinning through his magnificent beard that reminded Harry of Hagrid.

"Oh sure," said Harry quickly, digging into his pocket.

"Your a gentlemen and a saint," said the guy, doffing his hat and handing Harry the magazine.

Harry wandered away, looking from the magazine to the man - was that how he was going to end up? Dressed in battered clothes selling magazines on the street for a living, some kind of small dog all he would have for company?

He shook his head from the thoughts when he saw a large, clinical looking shop on the corner called 'Specsavers' and headed towards it, squaring his shoulders slightly. Once in he booked an appointment for an hour's time and wandered back into town. He looked around, feeling slightly lost, never having been shopping in the town before. He decided to wander down the main street for a while and see what took his fancy.

The first shop he went into was a camping shop called 'Millets' where he wandered around with a basket, picking up a waterproof coat, small sleeping bag, Swiss army knife, thermos flask and a torch. He was quite tempted by the pop-up tent, but had a sudden image of sitting in the middle of some random street in London in his tent while the business people walked past and decided against it. In one cabinet he saw a range of hunting knives and again was tempted to buy one, he'd need some sort of protection if he'd be travelling and unable to perform magic. However, there was a small sign on the glass that demanded I.D. to prove you were over 16; I.D. Harry didn't have so he forgot about it. In the queue he was sandwiched in between a young couple who were buying the tent he'd seen and a man that stank of mildewed clothes and asked him incessantly if he'd ever hunted and skinned a rabbit before.

Next stop was a small market where the stalls were crammed with random, overpriced rubbish. However the bag stall came in handy and he got himself a deep rucksack and he came across a small, slightly illegal looking weapon stall that didn't bother asking for I.D. when he purchased a knife from them. He severely doubted he'd ever actually be able to use it against someone, but it never hurt to have something threatening at hand.

The time had come for his appointment and he headed back to the shop, laden with shopping and unconsciously scanning the crowds for the brown and blonde dreadlocked hair. He didn't see her again

though and he trudged into the shop, waiting on a squeaky leather seat to be called through. The eye test took about ten minutes as Harry was fitted with various bizarre looking contraptions which lenses of differing strengths were placed into as he read the sign on the wall.

"Your vision seems to have declined slightly since your last visit to us...eight years ago?" asked the man incredulously, consulting his notes and looking over to Harry, obviously demanding an explanation.

"Oh really?" he asked innocently, "I never realised otherwise I'd have come back."

"Indeed, you should keep regular check-ups," reprimanded the man, before examine Harry's glasses, "you seem to have kept them in excellent condition though."

Harry wanted to see the mans face if he was told that it was five years worth of repairing charms that had done it not his careful use of them.

"So, you want contacts then?" asked the doctor, reaching for a prescription pad, "well I'm glad to say that that will be possible, if you come back in four days, I'll get the reception to give you an appointment, and we'll fit them for you and show you how to clean them."

"Excellent," said Harry, feeling immensely pleased with himself, "could I just ask if it would possible to get them tinted a different colour? I saw in a magazine somewhere that was possible?"

"Of course," said the man, not interested at all why Harry might have wanted that, "just have a look at this chart and pick your colour, we've also got several designs you might like - spirals, snakes eyes, St Georges flags, Union Jacks, pure white, red."

Harry's heart gave a lurch of fear, red eyes? Snakes eyes? In his mind he could vividly see those evil red eyes staring back at him

through the gloom of the department of Mysteries and he gave shudder.

"Just brown, thanks," he said in a tight voice, aware he could feel his heart thundering.

"Great, take this through to the reception and I'll see you in a few days," said the doctor handing him a prescription and waving him to the door.

Harry gave his thanks and organised a second appointment, wondering wildly if he'd even be able to make it back outside for a second time. His great adventure outdoors was officially over, he had to get back before Aunt Petunia realised he was gone. It wouldn't be such a big problem if she did, she didn't know he wasn't allowed out this year, but he just didn't want to mention it to the Order members - there would be awkward questions.

When he got to the bus stop he scanned the waiting queue, feeling quite saddened when he saw Kitty wasn't there before shaking himself slightly - what was with him? He was getting so easily distracted by someone he hadn't seen for eight years, known for about five only vaguely and whom he'd spoken to for about an hour today? Despite this he spent the rest of the time wondering whether she was living anywhere close - maybe he'd see her around Little Whinging? He reassembled his disguise slowly, jumping off the bus and heading towards home, noting with dismay he couldn't find today's guard, whoever it was, they were sure well hidden.

He re-entered the house with no problem and managed to sneak past Aunt Petunia, who was preparing a chicken in the kitchen, to get up to his room. He prised the floorboards away from his secret hiding place and put all his new things into it and getting into bed. He lay there for a few hours until he heard Uncle Vernon come home and the noise level increased with dinner being prepared and the TV blaring away, then made a big show of getting up, standing in full view of the window so his guard could see he'd just risen.

He moved over to his school trunk and pulled out a small cloth bag whose contents tinkled as he lay it on the desk. He pulled the wooden

board he'd salvaged from the shed towards him and the tube of superglue he'd stolen from the kitchen before tipping out the content of the bag onto it. Hundreds of tiny shards of glass littered the surface and Harry squared his shoulders, pulling the biggest piece out. He examined his reflection in the dirty mirrored surface of it for a few seconds, before flipping it over, the words 'in yours. Jame' was clearly visible written on the back. He placed it in the centre of the wooden board and began to search the other pieces for the 's and I used' piece.

He let his fingers work away as he went into autopilot, as he thought about the mirror and how stupid he had been. He had been so sure he was protecting Sirius by not looking into the package he had been given at Christmas, but obviously not, this would have been the only thing that could have saved him. If only he'd looked into the mirror and not spoke to that traitorous Kreacher, if only he had known Snape checked on his Godfather, if only he didn't have a stupid 'saving people thing'. The pain of all the missed opportunities was more than he could bear, they felt like they were suffocating him where he sat.

After an hour or so had passed he sat back and looked at his progress, 'need to speak to me'...'just say'...'James and I used'...Almost half the inscription was there now. His throat tightened slightly as he began to rearrange the letters, hoping to make more sentences, his fingers shaking at the one that he had created.

If you need...just say my name...speak to me...I'll be able...to...appear...

## Chapter Three

I have hours, only lonely,  
My love is vengeance,  
That's never free.

Remus was sat at the massive table in the kitchen of Grimauld Place reading an article in the Daily Prophet with open mouthed astonishment. It seemed the Ministry's hold on Azkaban was tenuous to say the least and he, like Dumbledore, feared the worst. Any day news would come of a mass breakout if the Orders plan of infiltration didn't succeed. He shuddered slightly at that thought and turned the page when his eye caught by a small advertisement in the bottom corner.

Weasley Wizard Wheezes - So you want to turn your ex into a WARTHOG?

Those two, he thought, shaking his head with a small smile on his face, they're insane.

Summer Fun Special Offers - buy one shrinking wig get a nipple engorgement shirt free!

They would get into serious trouble one day. He tried to be serious about it and take Molly's point of view, but the sound of a nipple engorgement shirt sounded too comical...

"We've got a situation!" came a distant voice, echoing around the kitchen walls suddenly.

"What's up Dung?" asked Remus at once, abandoning his tea to speak into his wrist.

"Unidentified person approaching the door of Potter's house," he said, sounding as if he'd just been woken up from a peaceful slumber.

"Magical?" demanded Remus, already walking over to the Fireplace.

There was a few seconds of silence, before Mundungus's wheezy voice returned to Remus.

"Nope, actually," he said, sounding slightly embarrassed, "about as un-magical as you can get, we've got ourselves a super-muggle."

"It's not another delivery man is it Dung?" asked Remus, already walking back over to his chair, "like the last three times?"

"Nah, no uniform or anything like you said," he replied and Remus shook his head slightly as he dipped a biscuit in his tea.

"Get in touch with Mrs Figg, get her to go in and just check what's going on," said Remus finally, "just in case."

"Right you are," said Mundungus, "see you later."

"Goodbye," said Remus to the kitchen in general, rolling his eyes as he continued to read the paper.

Harry was feeling remarkably unguilty that morning, which was really quite amazing considering that after leaving the window open the other night, Dudley's flu had worsened and his Uncle had been sent for medicine. He was too happy that this would mean he would be able to get away on Friday to pick up his contacts. The night before Harry had carefully wrapped up the beginnings of the mirror and placed it on his desk and he now seated himself back down for another few hours of work.

Around one 'o' clock he went in search of something to eat, returning to his room with a cheese sandwich to find an unfamiliar owl sitting on his desk amongst the parchment. He approached it cautiously, looking around the room. It held out its leg placidly and he took the letter off it and the small package. He studied the letter, vaguely recognising the handwriting and opened it quickly.

To Harry,

Just a quick note to make sure you caught the latest issue of Balls, check out the brunette on the new Cleensweep model - I wouldn't



mind taking that for a ride! George says page 10 might interest you. Hope the summer's going well and you are tormenting Dudley to the best of your abilities - we've got you a little present to help that go along a little better.

Excellent little spying device you've gave us an idea for when you stole that Snitch from our last match, (great muggle repelling charms on them, they can't see a thing!). It's only a prototype, but we thought our investor might as well see what his money's bought. Enjoy!

Gred and Forge

p.s. We've already found a few rather interesting facts our dearest baby bro with this - tell you all when we see you!

Harry smiled faintly at the twin's letter and pulled the package towards him, slightly worried it might have been a hoax on his part. But when he opened it he found a small wooden box, inside which was an inactive Snitch and a small roll of parchment. He picked it up and examined it, looked like a regulation Quidditch Snitch, nothing different about it at all. He unfurled the parchment.

Simply hold the Snitch and command it to 'Work, damn you' and watch this nifty device fly! Keep your eye on the lid of the box and command its flight!

Harry frowned at the bizarre instructions before placing them on his desk and examining the Snitch.

"Work, damn you," he said tentatively.

He watched as the Snitch's wings unfurled and it took to the air, hovering at eye level. Harry picked up the wooden box it came in and looked at the lid, nearly dropping it at shock at what he could see. There, looking like a magical picture had been pasted onto it, was himself, staring at the box.

"A camera?" Harry wondered out loud, looking from the Snitch to the box.

It worked perfectly, he could see and heard everything that the Snitch could. Feeling slightly reckless he looked across to the Snitch and commanded it to show him the Dursley's in the kitchen.

At once it zipped out of the door and Harry followed its darting flight on the small screen as it went down the stairs, through the hall and into the kitchen where Aunt Petunia was preparing a huge bowl of chicken soup for Dudley and his Uncle was ranting on the phone to the plumbers.

"This is amazing," Harry whispered, watching as the Snitch took a massive close up of Uncle Vernon's nostrils and he didn't notice a thing.

After a while he snapped the lid shut and a few seconds later the Snitch was waiting eye-level for instruction.

"Work, damn you?" he asked again hesitantly, grinning at the inactive snitch dropped to the floor.

He heard the doorbell ring downstairs and Harry placed the Snitch into the box on his desk, writing a reminder on a scrap of paper to write to Fred and George later. He was just about to start working on the mirror again when the door to his bedroom smashed open. He spun around, wand out in a flash.

"Put that thing away boy!" hissed his Uncle, walking across to the window and looking outside fearfully, "what do you think you're doing, eh?"

"Sorry, you just surprised me Uncle," said Harry, slipping his wand back into his pocket.

His Uncle snorted like an angry bull and fixed him with a disgusted glare, "One of your lot are here to see you."

"What?" asked Harry blankly, looking over to his calendar, the Order weren't supposed to be here till tomorrow.

"I don't appreciate being interrogated like this boy," his Uncle continued angrily, his podgy fingers prodding him in the chest, "once every three days is bad enough but I'll have no more surprise visits do you hear?"

"I'll tell them that Uncle," agreed Harry, he really couldn't have people turning up unplanned - what if they'd come yesterday and discovered his absence?

"Right," his Uncle spluttered, surprised at Harry's agreement, but recovering quickly, "now get down there and tell them everything is fine, do you hear me?"

"Of course," said Harry glumly, following his Uncle down the stairs.

He got to the front door to see his Aunt Petunia glaring at him angrily from the kitchen.

"You're not due till tomorrow -" began Harry wearily as he swung the door open before his mouth dropped open in shock.

Standing on the doorstep was Kitty Earl.

"Didn't realise you were expecting me," she said, laughing at his expression, "surprise surprise it's Cilla Black!"

"Kitty?" Harry said blankly, hanging onto the doorframe for support, "what...how..."

She merely continued to smile at him as he spluttered incoherently, well aware that his heart was hammering madly in his chest. His mind was taking a long to catch up with his eyes.

"What the hell are you doing here?" he finally managed to exclaim.

"Hello to you too," she said, "I was in the neighbourhood and was bored - figured I'd pop by, see what you're up to?"

"Right," Harry said, suddenly very aware of his Uncle looming presence behind him and Mrs Figg walking extremely slowly past their garden fence, watching curiously.

He needed to do some quick thinking.

"Come in," he said urgently, pulling her into the house by the arm and shutting the door quickly.

"Now listen here you," began his Uncle, shaking a finger at Kitty, who gave a surprised exclamation, "I've already told your lot that we don't want -."

"Uncle!" Harry said urgently, "This is Kit - Catherine Earl. She went to school with me and Dudley!"

Harry looked at his Uncle with pleading eyes, willing him to get the message. His uncle narrowed his eyes at Harry dangerously and seemed to be doing some equally quick thinking. Kitty stared at him blankly, before frowning at his Uncle's expression.

"Petunia!" he shouted suddenly and Harry cringed inwardly.

She came walking back down the hall and took in the scene, young girl looking at everyone in confusion, Harry staring doggedly at his shoes and his Uncle glaring at the two, moustache quivering.

"Yes dear?" she asked, trying to appear loving and caring for the Orders sake.

"This girl here went to school with Dudley and Harry," he said, in a forced calm voice.

"Oh...really?" asked his Aunt in surprise, scrutinising Harry closely and then the girl.

She had a look on her face that was reminiscent of the one she used when around Tonks, as if Kitty had mortally offended her with her wild hair, piercings and outrageous clothes. Harry felt his stomach

dropping even further, the Dursley's didn't know what to do, they were being awkwardly silent. Kitty was looking towards him for help.

Just when he thought it could get any worse, the doorbell went again and everyone jumped.

"Who's this now?" growled his Uncle, reaching in between Harry and Kitty and wrenching the door open.

Harry cringed even more, there standing on the doorstep was Mrs Figg, wringing her hands in distress.

"Oh Vernon dear, you haven't see Mr Tibble's have you?" she began whining almost instantly, stepping into the house before Uncle Vernon could stop her.

"What?" demanded his Uncle loudly, going a deep red colour.

"Mr Tibble's, my cat, you know the one - he's got a little patch of white fur just above his ear and he's -," she began doing a good impression of being deeply upset whilst taking in every detail of Kitty's appearance.

"No I haven't seen your sodding cat you crazy -," began his Uncle until he remembered Kitty's presence and stopping, breathing deeply.

There was silence for a few seconds.

"- he's fond of sardines but I do tend to find he likes a bit of salmon in the evening," continued Mrs Figg unhesitantly.

"Hey, what's going on here?" demanded Kitty suddenly and Harry closed his eyes, "all I wanted to do was visit -"

"RIGHT! That's it!" exclaimed Uncle Vernon, by now a quivering wreck as he wrenched open the door, "Mrs Figg, I haven't seen your cat, and as for you young lady; we're very busy and are about to have dinner so you'll will just have to excuse us!"

Mrs Figg made an exclamation of shock at his Uncle's tone and let her bottom lip quiver as she walked out of the door. Kitty looked across to Harry who stubbornly refused to meet her eyes, he felt sick inside, and a great sense of loss knowing that Kitty would never have the guts to call around again after this.

"We really are quite busy," said his Uncle forcefully, showing her the door.

"Harry -," she began uncertainly.

"Go and lay the table boy," his Uncle said loudly and Harry swallowed down the insult he wanted to throw back.

There was nothing he could do though, Mrs Figg was still on the doorstep watching everything and his Aunt and Uncle were glaring at him, arms folded angrily. He turned around and began to walk towards the kitchen, feeling Kitty's eyes on his back. He felt miserable, he'd lost the chance to talk to Kitty, the Order would be paying special attention to him now and Uncle Vernon was about to have a very big argument with him.

"Goodbye," his Uncle was saying pointedly at the door.

"Je-sus! You are such a prick," was Kitty's own final shot as she walked through the door and Uncle Vernon slammed the door in her face, incandescent with rage.

"BOY!" came the roar and Harry turned around wearily.

"Oi Remus, you still there?" echoed Mundungus's voice around the Kitchen for a second time in the space of ten minutes.

"Yes I'm still here Dung," said Remus wearily, speaking into his wrist again, "what's wrong now?"

"I've got Figgy here, news about our super-muggle," he said, sounding very impressed with himself.

"Ok," he said heavily, leaning back on his chair, preparing himself for Mrs Figg's ten minute mad ramble in which he'd be informed that it was indeed a delivery man, "put her on."

"Oh Remus dear," began Mrs Figg's distraught voice before there was a muffled sound, "am I talking into the right bit -"

"Just here Figgy."

"What, I don't understand -"

"Just into my wrist here, just speak. Merlin's teeth..."

"I'm not putting my nose up your sleeve, look at it, it's filthy and torn and -"

"Mundungus," interrupted Remus, "why don't you just tell me it was the delivery man?"

"But it wasn't, that's the point isn't it!" said Mundungus, speaking loudly over the voice of Mrs Figg who was mumbling tearfully in the background.

"Who was it then?" sighed Remus, perching precariously on two legs of his chair, as he prayed to the ceiling for strength.

"It was a girl," he said importantly, holding his information for as long as possible to get the maximum effect, "for Harry."

Remus gave a start and there was a sudden moment of weightlessness as his chair hovered between falling on four feet and falling on the floor. It chose the latter and Remus gave a yelp of pain as he slammed into the cold, stone floor.

"Oi, Remy, you still there?" echoed Mundungus's voice around Remus's head as he pulled himself to his knees.

"A girl you say?" demanded Remus quickly, jumping to his feet, "what kind of girl?"

"A muggle girl like I said," Mundungus replied smartly, "Figgy here say's she was definitely visiting Harry, she was speaking to him and everything."

"What - right, ok," began Remus, trying to figure out what to do about this, "Put Mrs Figg back on and tell her to explain everything very carefully, tell her it's very important."

Remus listened to Dung relaying this and fidgeted impatiently, rubbing the small of his back that was aching from his fall now. There were a couple of feeble protests before Mrs Figg came through loud and clear.

"Remus dear, Vernon was most rude to the both of us! All I asked was if he had seen Mr Tibbles! Now of course I knew that he was in my house, but I thought it would be a kind of cover story, so I explained about the salmon and he was-"

"Mrs Figg," interrupted Remus quickly, already despairing, "the girl, can you explain about the girl?"

"What, oh right, ok, let me see," she muttered and mumbled before beginning in a slow, rehearsed manner, "I went to the door like Mundungus said and she was in the hallway with Petunia and Vernon and Harry. Harry looked very worried to see me and was not looking at either of us. Vernon then proceeded to demand that both myself and the girl should leave. Which we did."

"I see," said Remus, frowning slightly and beginning to pace the kitchen, "Dung, ask her what the girl looked like, describe to me in detail everything about her."

The question was debated between the two on the other end of the conversation and Remus summoned a quill and paper, sitting down at the table again and waiting for Mrs Figg, in her own special way, to recount the meeting.

"She is a very scruffy looking girl," she began, obvious distaste in her voice, "if she was my daughter I wouldn't have her walking outside looking like that, anyone would think she'd never seen an iron, or a-"



"Mrs Figg," Remus pleaded wearily, "scruffy you say, ok...tell me more, what was her hair like, eyes, accent..."

"She had the most awful hair," sniffed Mrs Figg, sounding unimpressed, "Those awful Medusa snakes so common these days, I've seen them down on the housing estates with them you know – bunch of ruffians listening to their tuneless music...Oh well, I guess her eyes, blue I think, yes probably blue and she had piercings."

Remus almost smiled at the shudder in her voice but the situation was too serious for that.

"Accent?" he asked, jotting notes down on the paper.

"Oh it wasn't nice," she said at once, which Remus could have guessed she would have said, "one of those awful ones where they can't pronounce the whole word, you know, forget there's aitches in words - the type that would finish every sentence with a 'yeah' or 'man' or some other such vulgarity...and I'll tell you something Mr Lupin, the language she used...I won't taint our conversation by repeating what she called Vernon!"

"I see," said Remus, smile tugging at his lips now, "and you say she was there to see Harry?"

"Yes that's right, she said 'all I wanted to do was visit Harry' when Vernon was being rude to me, he didn't take to kindly to her either, they pushed her out the same as me!"

She sounded scandalised.

"You didn't recognise her did you Mrs Figg?" asked Remus against hope, he knew she was lately to forget such an important piece of information as a name.

"I most certainly did not," she said at once, "for I would be saddened to see the likes of her around this neighbourhood."

"Ok," he said thoughtfully, looking down at his notes, "did you manage to speak to her?"

"I didn't want to," said Mrs Figg primly, "she was muttering to herself and kicking Petunia's flowers! Now I don't like that family anymore than you do Mr. Lupin, but that's sacrilegious – a woman's garden is her own private property!"

"I see," said Remus solemnly, "well, thank you Mrs Figg, I'll get back in touch with you if I have any more questions. Dung?"

"Aye?" came the cocky voice once again, Mrs Figg muttering the background, "any ideas? Theories who our mystery girl is?"

"Old girlfriend?" he suggested, a leer evident in his voice, "she was quite pretty in a scruffy kind of way."

"Mundungus!" came Mrs Figg's horrified voice in the background.

"I doubt it," said Remus thoughtfully, "ok, I'll talk to you later this evening, keep an eye for her, and I'll do a little research."

"Right you are, I'll get Tonks up to date, she's on next."

"Ok, bye."

He cut the connection and picked up the paper he'd been jotting notes down on, regarding it with a frown.

"Scruffy, braided hair, piercings, bad language," he muttered to himself, getting up and walking over to the fireplace, "common accent, not local...who the hell are you?"

He threw a handful of powder in the fire and stuck his head in.

"Alastor, can I have a word, it's urgent."

It was two hours later. The expected argument had raged for almost half an hour until Harry had locked himself in his room, of only to get away from a situation where he didn't care what he was doing or shouting to the Dursley's. All the pain and anger that had been

bottled up inside him since he'd left Hogwarts was spilling out into Number Four, Privet Drive and the walls had been shaking with the continuing argument. After he'd allowed himself time to cool down he went back downstairs and walked straight out of the front door, aware of his Uncle's yells towards him.

At the bottom of the garden he stopped.

"I know you're here somewhere," he said in a dull voice, "everything is fine, we're just arguing about a visitor that came to the house that I used to go to Primary school with. Don't make it worse by coming in. I am going to the park now, and I want to be alone so if you're going to follow me I don't want to see you."

Satisfied that any hidden Order member would have heard that he set off down the road. Bitter wind biting him through his tee shirt as he traipsed the empty streets towards the park feeling thoroughly miserable. Once there he fell into one of the swings, snaking his arms round the chains and pushing himself backwards and forwards slightly as he stared at the floor. He was in so much trouble now he didn't know which way to look. Now he was arguing again with his relatives the Order would be sure to post extra people around, especially as they seemed very interested in finding out who Kitty was.

Not that it mattered now he told himself moodily, there was no way she was going to want to try and see him again after today's firework display. The only thing that cheered him slightly was the fact she'd managed to get a decent insult in before the door had been slammed in her face. He kicked at the bark shaving on the floor slightly, closing his eyes wearily, he felt so tired of it all. The constant battles, the fear, the worry, the hurt and pain. He just wanted it to stop once and for all.

"Hey Harry."

His eyes snapped open and he looked to the source of the voice, the person standing in front of him looking slightly grim. He stared at Kitty a long time, unable to get his head around what was happening. She was back again? Somewhere deep inside him he felt suspicious, why

was she always around? But the questions and doubt were washed away at the inexplicable feeling that had overcome him when he heard her voice again.

"They haven't beaten you into silence have they?" she asked him, smile on her face but sounding serious.

"No, don't be stupid," he said, staring at the floor again.

"So, what was all that about man?" she asked him, and Harry felt his stomach writhing with worry.

"Nothing," he replied grimly, refusing to look at her.

"Yeah, seemed it," she replied, sitting on the next swing along from him.

She didn't say anything for a few minutes and began to swing slightly as he was. Harry tried to sort through the confusion in his mind, about what he was going to do now, if his plan would work, what Kitty was doing here, what he should tell her. He looked around the park suddenly, remembering that an Order member would be here somewhere, listening and watching...he cursed himself for telling them to remain out of sight earlier.

He heard Kitty pulling something out of her pocket and he wondered if he ought to try and explain in some way what was happening.

"Want one?" she was asking him.

He looked across to see her offering him a cigarette from a half full packet, she had a very serious expression on her face, quite different from her usual grins and smiles.

"No thanks," he said, "I don't smoke."

"Do you mind if I do?" she asked him and he shook his head, thoughts still on trying to come up with a valid explanation.

He watched as she patted her pockets absentmindedly before pulling out a chunky silver Zippo, lighting up a cigarette and exhaling deeply.

"Are they always like that?" she asked him finally.

"No," he lied, feeling the misery increase.

"You are such a bad liar it's unbelievable," she told him, a smile creeping back onto her face.

He shrugged half heartedly - what was the point in lying to her anyway? She couldn't do anything about it and after Friday, if all went according to plan, he'd never see her again. What would she care anyway? She seemed worldly wise enough to him to understand that some people are just not nice.

"You know, I almost knew that was going to happen," she told him, blowing a few smoke rings that he watched float into the air and disappear.

"What do you mean?" he asked her, watching her through the chains of the swings.

"I knew that something was wrong with your setup. I wondered why you were trying to sneak out in disguise and everything," she began, before turning to fix him with an intent stare, "you can always tell when people are unhappy, when they want to get out."

At this Harry jumped up from his seat making furious shushing noises at her.

"Don't say stuff like that," he said in a panicked voice as he backed away from the swings.

She reeled back in shock as he looked around desperately - the Order were bound to hear what she was saying - they'd know, his plan would be for nothing, he'd be carted back to Hogwarts and have to face everything. The panic squeezed at his heart, making it hard to breathe or even think.

"Why the hell not? It's the truth!" she demanded, also on her feet looking torn between angry and confused.

He clapped a hand over her mouth in desperation and tried to give her a pleading look. She watched him with wide, nervous eyes as her whole body tensed up as Harry tried to desperately think.

"Please, don't say anything for a second," he pleaded in a quiet voice.

She nodded slowly and Harry dropped his hand. He looked over his shoulder and all around him, cursing the Order once again for their use of Invisibility cloaks - he had no idea where they were or how much they could hear. She was watching him with deeply troubled eyes and Harry became aware that he was gripping her wrists rather tightly and loosened the pressure. He tried to think straight, what could he tell her that would make any sense?

"What's going on Harry?" she asked him slowly, looking him dead in the eye.

He took a deep breath before leaning towards her slowly until he was resting his forehead on hers. If possible her eyes went even wider and he knew she was about to ask him another question so he began to talk.

"Listen," he began in a very low voice, "it doesn't matter if it is the truth, you can't talk about things like that aloud. There are going to be people around who can hear, who could tell them and it'd just make everything a million times worse."

She was silent for a few moments, obviously doing some quick thinking of her own and Harry wondered wildly if the position they were standing in looked romantic enough for the Order members to back off. He was curious to note she wasn't as tense as before and wasn't struggling out of the situation he'd put her in.

"Harry, there's nobody here," she said in an equally quiet voice.

"You don't know that," he told her.

"You can't let them get to you like this Harry," she began in a whisper, looking worried for him, "I can see why you're worried but they can't hurt you if you get out."

"Kitty," he cautioned, looking from side to side anxiously.

"No, you listen to me! They're getting to you Harry, making you think you're being watched all the time, followed, bugged or whatever, but there not, ok? You know they can't do that. But if you stay in that place they're going to make you believe Harry, they're going to keep on at you until you can't fight back any more. If they break your spirit like that you'll, you'll never be able to go back ok? Do you understand me?"

Harry was silent in shock for a long moment as Kitty's bitter words died away. He felt like all the hairs on the back of his neck were standing on end when he went over what she said, looking deep into her eyes that were only a few centimetres away.

"Why do you care?" he asked her, avoiding having to answer her question.

"Because I do," she shrugged.

"Why?" he demanded, "you've only known me for a few hours. You've got no idea what kind of person I am or what I've done in my life, so why do you care?"

"Why do you care so much about what I think?" she challenged him, staring at him dead straight in the eye, "why are we stood here like this?"

Harry dropped her wrists and backed away from her, feeling slightly ashamed for having used her like that to draw the focus of the Order away. He looked all around him, still no sign of his guard which was not good news.

"Listen, that doesn't matter ok?" she said, running a trembling hand across the bun of her hair and also looking around as if she now also suspected spies.

"I've got to go," said Harry suddenly, noticing the descending gloom, "it's getting near sundown. They're expecting me back."

"Harry -" she began sadly, as if he'd just proven her point exactly.

"Thanks for trying to come round today, sorry about the hassle," he said in a rush, backing off.

"Harry!" she called to him as he walked across the park sounding confused and almost hurt.

He couldn't help but turn around and look at her as he walked backwards, there was almost no disobeying the voice.

"Tonight from 10, there's an R&B and Hip Hop night on at Club Destiny!" she called in an almost pleading voice, "Come?"

He felt a lurch in his stomach before he called back, "Can't!"

"Harry!" she shouted again, but he focussed on the gate now, he would not turn around, he would not turn around...

He was out of the gate to the park when the Order member fell into step beside him and he fought desperately against the urge to turn around and see what Kitty was doing.

"Who was that?" asked Tonks a little while later.

Harry didn't reply, shoving his balled up fists deep into his pockets - it wasn't any of their business.

"If you don't tell us Harry we'll just have to find out some other way," she told him gently, as if knowing she was going to anger him more, "we need to make sure she's not a spy or a Dea-"



" - She's not a Death Eater ok?" he cut in harshly, "Just leave her alone!"

"I wasn't going to go round and interrogate her if that's what you think Harry," Tonks told him, motioning for him to take the quickest route home, "we just need to know who she is -"

"Yeah, you've already said," Harry replied bitterly, "but you know what's going to happen, you're going to start prodding around and drawing attention to her and before you know it she'll be another target for Voldemort."

"You're getting paranoid Harry," said Tonks flatly, "we're just trying to look after you."

"Well you're doing a great job so far!" he said loudly and walking a little faster.

Tonks let him walk on a little ahead with a sigh, turning her attention back to the park. She could still make out the figure of the girl sitting on one of the swings, staring at the floor. She wondered what the situation was she had here, she had never seen or heard about this girl before today, yet she and Harry were quite obviously romantically involved. A little part of her felt sorry for Harry, not even being allowed out alone with a girl, having to keep her secret to keep her safe, she wondered if Harry thought it was worth it.

## Chapter Four

No one knows what it's like,  
To feel these feelings,  
Like I do,  
And I blame you.

"The plot thickens."

Remus and Moody looked around the kitchen involuntarily, before raising their wrists to their mouth.

"Explain," barked Moody first and Remus fought the urge to roll his eyes.

"Our More-Muggle-Than-Most girl has been to visit Harry again," came Tonks voice, "looks like love is in the air."

"What?" demanded Remus incredulously, "what's going on over there?"

"Well, about an hour into my shift Harry came out of the house, looking extremely upset, I think they'd been arguing in the house about our mystery girl turning up," said Tonks, her voice sounding slightly muffled for some reason, "he didn't see me but he said something along the lines of knowing there was an Order member nearby, that we shouldn't go in the house because it would only make things worse and that the girl is an old friend from Primary school."

"I thought he didn't have any friends," Moody said brusquely, looking to Remus who also looked surprised at the news.

"Oh there's more," she said, sounding almost gleeful at her secret.

"Well?" demanded Moody at once, both eyes staring unseeingly ahead as he waited for a reply.

"I followed Harry under cloak to the park, where he sat on the swings like he did last year, only guess who turned up only five minutes after he'd got there? Our girl that's who."

"She's watching him?" demanded Moody, "and she's following him, did you detect any magic on her?"

"No, she's completely clean, like Dung said, she's actually extremely muggle, not a drop of magic in her."

"What did they talk about?" Moody asked, gnarled hand twirling his wand around, quite ominously in Remus's opinion.

"I don't know I was keeping my distance," replied Tonks and Remus flinched, awaiting Moody's retribution.

"Keeping your distance!" he yelled into his wrist right on cue, "Auror School training lesson number 1 Tonks! When trying to find out information it's usually best to keep within earshot of the subject!"

"Harry told me to keep out of his way and when-"

"Oh well if Harry told you that then it's fine!" he raved, throwing his hand up in indignation, "and I supposed if Voldemort asked you to kindly stop fighting him you would!"

"Of course not, if you'd let me finish!" she said angrily, "Harry told me to keep out of his way so I sat on the other side of the park when she turned up. They had a very intense conversation-"

"An argument?" Moody interrupted, "And you didn't think he might need assistance?"

"No, let me finish! They were having an intense conversation, codeword for personal, romantic, get it?" cut in Tonks once again, sounding furious at Moody's comments, "anyway, I was about to get closer to see what exactly was going on when he kissed her."

"Kissed her?" asked Remus, feeling shocked, "how long has he known her?"

"About ten minutes by my watch," said Tonks dryly.

"So, we've got a female capable of befuddling Potter," said Moody almost to himself, "someone who can get close, find information out, possibly even-"

"She's a complete muggle Mad-Eye," reminded Tonks, a slight giggle in her voice.

"Doesn't matter, we're going to have to be very careful about this one," dismissed Moody, jumping to his feet and going in to full Auror mode, "what I want to do then is go round, ask her a few questions. We can easily obliviate her by the sounds of it, end of situation."

"Hang on a second," said Remus, worried by Moody's trigger happy take on things, "that's not really necessary yet is it?"

"We've got an unidentified female with a large amount of sway over him, how are we to know she isn't working for some Death Eater?" he demanded.

"We've got absolutely no sign of magical interference," supplied Tonks, swinging towards Remus's opinion too, "how about this, I managed to track a bit of her route home, why don't I disguise myself as a teenager and get talking to her, I could ask her any question I liked then - better that than freaking her out Moody - what if she is just an innocent?"

"Listen, both of you," said Remus finally, "we don't want to go scaring her off, if she is just an innocent then we don't want to ruin whatever relationship she has with Harry. Lets think about it rationally, she could do Harry a lot of good, something to take his mind off everything."

"We don't want him to take his mind off anything!" proclaimed Moody, sounding horrified at the thought, "this boy needs constant vigilance, we don't want him wandering into some sirens trap and telling her everything!"

"Siren Mad-Eye?" asked Tonks incredulously, "Don't be so ridiculous!"

"I'll talk to him, I'm visiting tomorrow, I'll just ask him to explain about her," said Remus patiently and the other two were silent for a few seconds, which he took as acceptance, "excellent, well that's sorted."

Tonks gave a short goodbye and signed off and Remus looked over to Moody.

"No obliviation today Mad-Eye," he said with a slight grin, "not yet anyway."

"I don't like this situation," was all he said, "believe you and me, that girl is nothing but trouble, you only need to read her vital statistics to know that!"

"Would you feel better if we found out more about her?" asked Remus.

Moody shrugged slightly, obviously still vying for a full interrogation of the poor girl.

"I'll get Bill in on this, he did some good work in the muggle record department back in May," he suggested, if only to placate the jinx-happy Auror, "we'll get her name and details and then we'll think about giving her a visit."

"That girl's trouble," was all he said ominously, pulling the cloak around his shoulders, "mark my words. Keep me up-to-date."

And with that he was gone. Remus gave a low whistle and turned back to his piece of paper.

Scruffy, braided hair, piercings, bad language, common accent, not local.

She didn't sound like anybody Harry would ever be remotely associated with and Remus felt a deep sense of uneasiness developing. He picked up his quill and dipped it in his ink well before hovering it over the page, feeling a sense of disbelief as he wrote next to the list; girlfriend.

Harry lay on his bed staring at the ceiling. He had decided not to work on the mirror that evening, it was too painful. Instead he was going over his meeting with Kitty and everything she had said - it seemed to have set a fire within him, she'd managed to put into words what he had been battling to come to terms with since Sirius's death. That he was trapped, that they were slowly taking over him.

She told him that he knew they couldn't watch him all the time. They couldn't, that was impossible, he knew that now. She was right when she told him they'd make him believe.

"...if you stay in that place they're going to make you believe Harry, they're going to keep on at you until you can't fight back any more."

They were making him believe, these past summers they'd been gradually making him prisoner in his own house, gradually taking away everything that made living worthwhile. He didn't even have Hogwarts to look forward to this year, to help him get through the days. All that lay ahead of him on this path was pain, death, murder.

Murder or be murdered.

She had been right, she had known him for only a few hours but she could already see it. They were breaking his spirit.

"If they break your spirit like that you'll, you'll never be able to go back..."

What was going to happen to him? He could either stay in Hogwarts, in the magical world or wait to be hunted down, slowly being broken until whatever it was that made him would be stripped away, or he could leave.

Run.

Preserve him sanity, his humanity. He wasn't a murderer and he wasn't going to wait around to be murdered.

"...they can't hurt you if you get out."

Friday night, at 11.55, he'd get out.

That afternoon the doorbell rang for a second time and an odd feeling stole over Harry. He had been lying on his bed with a wet flannel on his burning forehead, which he pulled off as he sat up and stared at the door. He didn't know how, but he just knew it was Kitty. It was ridiculous he knew, and he couldn't imagine why she'd possibly attempt a second house visit in as many days but Harry waited with baited breath as he heard his Uncle marching down the corridor. As stealthily as possible Harry slid off his bed and crept onto the landings, watching through the rails of the banister as the door was opened.

He didn't manage to catch a glimpse of whoever it was due to his Uncle's massive form taking up most of the doorway, but he could hear everything crystal clear.

"You," he said nastily to whomever it was, "I've already told you we're very busy."

He made to shut the door but the visitor had stuck a foot in and Harry could almost hear his Uncle's snort of anger - he was almost certain it was Kitty now.

"Excuse me," his Uncle said in a loud, angry voice, "we're busy!"

"That's ok, 'cos I'm here to see Harry," came her reply, brimming over with sweetness.

Harry couldn't help but grin to himself, she had guts he'd give her that.

"He's not in," replied Vernon brusquely.

"Oh that's a shame," she said, quite obviously not believing a word of it, "would y'mind if I waited for him to come back?"

Harry had to fight to not let out a laugh - where did she get her courage from? Any lesser person would be quailing under the murderous glare of the raging bull.

"No you can not!" spluttered his Uncle, incandescent with rage, "goodbye!"

He forced her foot out of the door and slammed it shut so that the window panes rattled slightly. Harry could see from his hiding place his Uncle filling his lungs up ready to shout to him.

Ring ring.

He deflated quickly, whipping around to the door and glaring at it. Harry snickered to himself.

"Go AWAY!" roared his Uncle, spittle flying from his mouth.

There was a moment of brief silence and Vernon nodded to himself appreciatively then;

Ring, ring, ring.

"Girl!" he roared even louder, "If you do not stop this instant I am going to phone the police!"

Harry struggled not to laugh too loudly as silence reigned for a few moments.

Riiiiiiiiiinnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnngggggggggggggg  
gggggggggg-

Vernon flew at the door, wrenching it open to stop the long continuous ring Kitty was making, holding her finger on the button. Harry could picture her standing there looking the image of innocence.

"Now listen here you," he began, in a low voice that belied his rage.

"No, y'listen to me," cut in Kitty, causing Harry to stuff his fist into his mouth to stop the laughter, "if you don't let me see Harry this instant I'm gonna phone one of these four numbers: Childline, the RSPCC, Surrey County Council Social Services or the Police."



Harry had stopped laughing now and was regarding the back of his Uncle in shock. It seemed his Uncle was lost for words as well and Harry became aware of the ticking of the clock in the hall, echoing through the silence. Then his Uncle muttered something and began to turn away from the door. Harry scrambled to his feet and rushed back into his room.

"HARRY!" came the shout a few seconds later.

He tried to organise his face into one that would seem surprised and shocked and not be grinning like a lunatic at the comedy scene he'd just watched unfolding. He finally appeared at the top of the stairs to see Kitty standing confidently next to his Uncle. He tried to appear surprised but unfortunately caught Kitty's eye and began to grin.

"Visitor for you," he muttered a few seconds later and walked stiffly down the hall into the kitchen.

When his Uncle was safely out of sight Harry merely motioned to Kitty for her to follow him upstairs. She was chuckling to herself quietly and tucking her phone back into her pocket as he held the door open for her. Once they were safely inside Harry leant against it and grinned widely.

"Are you insane?" he asked her incredulously.

"Not clinically," she replied, flopping down onto his bed.

"Yeah right," he told her, shaking his head at her theatrics, "did you actually have all those numbers?"

"Yup," she said, pulling out her phone again, "took me ages to look um up last night! Thought he might need a bitta persuading after yesterday."

Harry shook his head a little more, watching as she dropped her bag on the floor, leant against the wall by his bed and kicked off her shoes. For a few seconds he could do nothing but watch her in wonder, asking himself for the thousandth time what she thought she was doing.

"What are you doing here?" he blurted out, feeling instantly foolish.

"Y'didn't say goodbye yesterday at the park," she said simply, rooting around in her bag for something.

"Ok," he said slowly, still none the wiser.

"And y'didn't come to the club," she added.

"I couldn't," he said, still looking at her with a kind of wonder, "was it good?"

"A1, tip-top, clubbing jam fair," she said with a grin.

"Was that in English?" he said after a moments pause.

"Yeah," she laughed, "do y'ever watch Spaced?"

"Erm...no?" he said slowly, feeling completely lost in the conversation.

"Oh well, y'should. It's a quote from that – wicked programme..." she said, nodding to herself, "I had to dance on my own."

"Oh," said Harry, feeling embarrassed and wrong-footed now, "sorry."

"Don't matter," she laughed, "I was only joking – we'll have to go another time."

She nodded to herself again and fell silent, looking around the room and not for the first time Harry wondered what the hell she was doing at his house, again.

"I just thought I'd see if y'fancied some company," she elaborated suddenly, "I was bored and thought, what the hell. McChicken sandwich right?"

Harry raised a hand to his throbbing forehead and gave her a blank look. She merely pulled out a small brown paper bag out of which wafted the unmistakable smell of McDonalds.

She handed it to him with a grin, "Thought y'might be hungry."

"I - thanks," he said, shaking his head slightly, "you do know you're strange right?"

"I'll take that the best way I can," she said, biting into one of her nuggets, "so, what y'been up to since we last did speak."

"Not a lot," he said through a mouthful of food, "moping generally."

She laughed appreciatively and looked around the room. He was quite glad he'd tidied up the evening before.

"You?" he asked, feeling it was only polite.

"Workin,'" she stated.

"Oh right, what do you do?"

"I work down at the - I hate to tell y'but I think your bird's escaped," she said suddenly.

"What?"

"Your bird," she said, pointing over to Hedwig's cage, "the doors open."

"Oh yeah, I've sent her to stay with friends," he explained awkwardly, realising suddenly how it sounded.

However, Kitty merely nodded and accepted it, too busy examining the contents to her burger.

"Why do they always put gherkin in these things?" she asked him vaguely, "everyone always picks them out – think of the number of gherkins in the world – I bet half are owned by MacDonalds."

He looked at her, grinning slightly.

"You really do think I'm mad don't you?" she laughed.

"Pretty much," he nodded and she merely bobbed her tongue out at him.

They finished their meal in silence and he watched her looking around his room at everything before a sudden thought sprang to mind. He had magical stuff littered everywhere in his room. On his desk was a half finished Transfiguration essay, the Spy Snitch box was sat open on his desk, his school trunk was open at the bottom of his bed - he even had a Gryffindor pennant tacked above his bedstead.

He gave a panicked look towards her but she was busily eating her burger, staring vaguely at the wall ahead of her. He edged slowly towards his desk, heart hammering madly in his chest - was there any way for the Ministry to know if you'd exposed a muggle to the magical world? He half expected an owl to swoop in right at that moment and catch him red handed.

He began to move the more obvious pieces – the Snitch, a few books and placed them into his trunk, snapping the lid down. He paused in the middle of the room for a few moments looking around – his wand was still on the bedside table...He moved over to get it.

"Checking for bugs?" she asked him, curious grin on her face.

He gave a nervous laugh and managed to slip his wand into his pocket unnoticed.

"No need to tidy up on my account," she said to him bemusedly, "I expect every self respectin teenager to live in a sty."

"I don't think my Aunt and Uncle would like that," Harry laughed, feeling slightly more relaxed now he felt a bit more muggle.

"Chuh," she snorted loudly, "don't reckon you'd do anythin right by them."

Harry didn't really know how to reply to that so he settled for shrugging his shoulders noncommittally.

"Did they say anythin when you got back last night?" she asked him.

"No, I went straight to bed," he told her, sitting down on the chair at his desk.

She nodded slowly, looking as if she might want to ask him further questions and he desperately tried to intervene, racking his brains for some sort of conversation starter.

"So, how was living in Birmingham?" he tried and she flashed him a look of understanding.

"Wolverhampton actually," she said, "we hate it when we're called Brummies."

"Oh, I thought you said on the bus you moved to Birmingham, sorry," he said in a rush, afraid he'd offended her.

"I probably did," she said with a wide grin, "I'm a chronic liar."

"I'll remember that in future," said Harry before catching himself.

He was assuming there was a future in this friendship that had so far lasted about two and a half hours.

"Yeah, I'm always in trouble for it," she said with a roll of her eyes, "but Wolves was ok, went to quite a few schools round there, never stayed in one place for long."

"Why was that?" he asked, pulling his knees up to his chin, regarding her intently.

"Basically on account of me gettin kicked out of them," she laughed, patting her pockets absentmindedly for something again, "schools a complete waste of time if y'ask me."

Harry stared at her for a few seconds, trying to work out if she was being funny, but soon realised she wasn't. Hermione would have a fit, he thought to himself with a pang in his heart. She had pulled out her packet of cigarettes again and was now hunting for the lighter.

"What did your mum think of all that?" he asked her tentatively, not knowing if under the sunny facade she was quite upset about what she'd told him.

"Dunno," she shrugged, moving over to the window, "she's been dead for like, two years or somethin. Probably not really bothered though I'd imagine."

"Dead?" said Harry in obvious shock, "I'm so sorry, I didn't realise...I thought you said she'd gone to America..."

"In the spiritual sense I guess," she said, shooting him an apologetic grin, "sorry - chronic liar."

Harry watched her with a small smile on his face, unbalanced by her obvious lack of grief. Things just didn't seem to get to her and he wondered what had caused that, why she had to seem so tough, that was until he realised he tried to do the same thing. With a feeling of further insight he watched as she pulled the window open and leaning across the bed onto it, propping her chin up on her elbows.

"Come and sit 'ere and tell me about y'school then," she asked, patting the empty spot next to her.

His stomach writhed uncomfortably as he sat down next to her, elbows resting on the window sill as they looked out across the terraced roofs of outer Surrey. She lit her cigarette and turned to face him expectantly. He was very aware that their shoulders were touching.

"Sounds thrillin," she prompted with a laugh when he hadn't said anything.

"Oh - er- well," he began, stuttering over his words until he told himself to focus, "not much to tell, it's a boarding school up north out

of everyone's way here. Some lessons are good, some are bad, you know, average school stuff."

"Mostly bad in my case," she laughed, and Harry was glad she didn't seem to question Hogwarts, "y'gotta lot of friends there?"

"Two or three close friends," he said neutrally, "you?"

"Not really," she said simply, looking unfazed, "just me, myself and I. I prefer to have acquaintances. Scatter them about y'know – make sure they never meet!"

"Oh," he said, looking out of the window in confusion, he'd never met anyone that liked to be on their own and knew she must be lying, "well, Stonewall next term..."

"Not for long," she said, blowing a plume of smoke onto the warm summer air, "not if I can help it."

"You're planning on getting kicked out?" Harry asked her with a grin.

"Most definitely," she laughed, "wouldn't you? Besides, like I said, schools overrated - the only things that are worth knowing Harry, are the things y'learn in real life, not in a classroom. There, that's my piece said...what's wrong with your head?"

"Huh?" he said blankly, caught off guard by her sudden switch of topic.

"You keep rubbin ya forehead - you gotta headache or somethin?" she said, motioning to his forehead, which he had been pressing the cooler tips of his fingers to.

"Oh," he said, dropping his hand quickly, "I just get - er - migraines. Every once in a while...it's nothing."

"I've got some paracetamol in my bag if y'want?" she said, making to get up.

"No, its ok," he said quickly, laying a hand on her arm, "like I said, it's nothing."

She gave a nod and her eyes looked quickly at his hand before staring off out the window, he removed it quickly, cursing his reactions that had been completely involuntary.

"Do y'know what the kids at school used to say about you and y'scar?" she said suddenly, giving him a wide grin.

"No...What?" he groaned loudly.

"That y'got electrocuted when y'were small - dunno if you've ever noticed by it looks just like a lightrnin bolt," she said, speaking out of the corner of her mouth as she search for the lighter for her cigarette which had gone out.

"It's been pointed out," he said, wishing she only knew.

"It's quite cool though isn't it really?" she said, leaning forward so she could scrutinise it carefully, "mind if I take a look?"

His eyes widened in shock as she regarded him as if she'd asked nothing more than to see a pair of new shoes. As he was becoming accustomed to though, Kitty didn't really care about the answer she was going to get and, after stubbing out her cigarette, leant a little closer. He didn't understand why she wanted to look at his ugly scar, but ignored the thought as she leaned a little closer. She brushed his fringe off his forehead and she began studying his scar closely with her electric blue eyes, reaching forward with a ringed finger. She rested it on the top of the lightning bolt and traced it smoothly to its base in a way that made Harry's spine tingle for some unknown reason. The scar now felt like it was on fire, but not from pain as he was now accustomed, but just from the inexplicable heat of her fingertip.

"It's so strange," she whispered, dropping her hand and looking deep into his eyes.



Harry didn't understand what was happening, but found himself recognising the feeling in his stomach, the same one he used to get when he saw Cho. It felt like he had been walking down the stairs and had missed a step, his heart beating against his ribs as he stared right back. A sudden recklessness overcame him, a need to let himself feel something other than the grief and pain he'd lived with since returning, a need to understand what he'd been feeling ever since he'd been in the company of Kitty.

He began to lean forwards slowly, heart still hammering away as the last thing he saw before he closed his eyes was Kitty doing the same.

The kiss was a million times sweeter than anything he'd shared with Cho, and for that brief while, he could feel no pain or sadness or anger, only joy. He couldn't help but grin into the kiss as she shifted closer slightly, tilting her head to one side as he, for the first time he could remember, let go of what it was that made him the Boy-Who-Lived.

When they broke apart for air a short while later they merely leaned against each others forehead, eyes closed peacefully as they breathed, only millimetre's from touching lips. He could feel her breath tickling his mouth, feel her heart beating wildly through her shirt and the heat from her lips they were so close.

Feeling as if he were in a dream and not the real world he opened his eyes slowly and studied her face, which looked peaceful yet familiar to him after the short time he'd known her. He reached out and slowly tucked one of the braids which had fallen out of her bun behind her ear, watching his hand in fascination as it did what it pleased without command. She gave a smile and leaned forward, kissing him softly again.

And there they would have stayed had, at that very moment, there not come a knock at the door. Harry's eyes snapped open and pulled away from Kitty, who shuffled away from him quickly, looking slightly shaken.

"Harry?" came the worried voice through the door.

Harry swore to himself, looking quickly over at the calendar - how could he forget it was the Order's visiting day? He climbed off the bed and was halfway to the door when it opened. Remus put his head around it.

"Harry, can I come..." he began, trailing off when he saw Kitty sitting on Harry's bed looking flushed, "...in..."

He looked over to Harry, immediately demanding an explanation. Harry found his tongue was stuck in his throat, his cheeks were already burning and his head was still foggy from the kiss and now he had to introduce two people who couldn't know each others identity.

"I better go Harry," said Kitty suddenly, sliding off the bed and gathering her bag and various items she'd already littered about the place.

"No - wait," began Harry desperately before shooting Remus a quick look.

"Gotta go see a man about a dog," she told him with a grin, meeting his eyes for a brief moment as if to explain.

"Right - ok," he said despondently, unable to string together a coherent sentence.

Remus stepped out of the way politely as she made for the door, swinging her bag onto her shoulders and giving him a faint smile. He followed her down the stairs, infinitely glad that his Aunt and Uncle were far away in the kitchen. When they were at the front door he opened it slowly and she stepped out onto the porch.

"He'll only be here for a few minutes," tried Harry, "I could probably be allowed to meet you at the park."

"I better get back to dad," she said her features darkening as she avoided his eyes, picking at the slight piece of peeling paint near the doorbell, "he'll be wonderin."

"Oh," said Harry, feeling bitterly disappointed, "I thought you said you lived with your aunt?"

"Chronic liar," she said with a shrug and a grin, "see y'about Harry."

Harry gave a silent nod, aware that this might be the last time he'd see her if his plan went accordingly tomorrow night. He didn't want to have to say goodbye now, not when he'd found the only good thing in the entire muggle world.

She gave a sad smile, as if she also felt this was more of a good bye than usual and leant forward and gave him a light kiss on the lips. He forgot the fact they were standing on the porch to Privet Drive and tried to maintain the kiss but she pulled away, shooting him an apologetic look. He wanted to say something more to her but she had already turned away and was already walking down the garden path and he had to stop himself running after her.

She was out of the drive and had turned around and gave him a small wave.

"Goodbye," said Harry finally, feeling the rush of pain and anger come flooding back.

She disappeared around the corner and Harry stood for a long time staring at the place he'd just seen her, a mixture of emotions now. Feeling like he'd much rather want to kick or punch something very hard now, he slammed the door a little louder than intended and strode up the stairs. When he entered his room, Remus was standing at the desk, absentmindedly pushing aside bits of parchment.

"You've got a lot of unanswered letters here," he noted, looking up to Harry with an odd expression on his face.

"How do you know they're unanswered?" Harry asked feeling the usual anger he felt when he encountered the Order rising.

"Because I've had about the same number of letters from them telling me that," he told him.

"Didn't realise my post was being watched as well," spat Harry, arms folded roughly against his chest, "all you've got to do now is give me detention and you could be Umbridge."

Remus batted aside the insult with nothing more than a look and placed a heavy tome on his desk.

"It's a book on legillimens Hermione wanted me to give you," he said, "she thought if you knew the theory of how it works, Occlumency might be easier. You are still practising I assume?"

Harry nodded wordlessly.

"Did you last night?" he prodded.

"Yes" sighed Harry angrily.

"So you didn't see the attack?"

"Yes I did," he replied, sitting down on the bed, "muggle house right? No survivors, place demolished."

Remus looked unnerved by Harry's answer, "You saw everything?"

"That's why my scars killing me," Harry shrugged, before allowing the memory to overtake the anger, "there was a little girl there, couldn't have been more than four. She tried to hide in the cupboard under the stairs...she was scared of the dark but she stayed there while the house was being torn apart and her family being murdered. I remember wanting to tell her to run away, not to stay because they'd find her eventually. But I couldn't, and she didn't..."

Harry lowered himself onto the edge of his bed. The last faint twinges of his scar were already leaving him, soon nothing of the attack would be left but the memory. And as Madam Pomfrey had said at the end of last year, sometimes the deepest scars are left by thoughts.

"It was a muggle born wizard they were after," said Remus eventually, sounding profoundly disturbed at Harry's words, "it's been on muggle TV, house fire apparently."

Harry just nodded, feeling drained and confused now - too much had happened today for him to process, not five minutes ago he had been kissing Kitty, now the muggle world seemed as far away and distant to him as the moon.

"Tell Hermione thanks for the book," Harry said finally, "I'll look into it tonight."

"Why don't you tell her? Just write her a letter so she knows that you're ok," pressed Remus gently, sensing Harry's change in mood.

But I'm not ok Harry wanted to scream, I'm not! His words to Dumbledore on that fateful night came back to haunt him.

I've seen enough, I've had enough, I want out!

"I will," he promised monotonously.

"I'll leave you now if you want?" asked Remus, which was greeted by silence, "ok...There's just one more question, I have to ask it Harry, you know I do."

"I won't tell you who she is," he stated flatly, he'd known they'd get round to Kitty some time.

"Harry, we need to know," said Remus gently.

"No you don't," cut in Harry, "there's no reason why it's got anything to do with the Order - you can't control my whole life."

"Harry," began Remus sternly, "you don't need me to explain to you the intricacies of the Polyjuice potion, or Death Eaters or Spies or even the Imperius Curse do you? Think with your head and not your heart for a minute."

"I'm thinking with my head," Harry said through gritted teeth.

"No you're not," Remus told him earnestly, "now listen to me. Five different Order members have seen you with her already, we already

know half of her route home, that she used to go to your primary school, that by her accent she's from the Midlands, Birmingham even! Now I'm telling you this because soon a report is going to be made to Dumbledore who will be able to find out in ten seconds flat who she is and everything about her. I've already got Moody itching to go and interrogate and obliviate her, Tonks wants to disguise herself as a teenager and go and talk to her, they are going to find out ok?"

Harry sat and listened to Remus in outraged silence, the anger building up into a fury. He could feel in a detached sort of way that his hands were balled up into fists, which were shaking.

"Get out," he told Remus in a low, dangerous voice.

"Harry -" began Remus in that self-same calm manner.

"GET OUT!" he yelled, striding open to the door and yanking it open for him.

"Just listen to me for a moment -" he asked desperately.

"Do you think I give a damn what you got to say?" Harry shouted, "While you lot are here keeping me prisoner in my own home innocent lives are being lost! It's more important that I'm not going to the shops than a little girl being tortured to death? You spend all this time following someone I've just been talking to, rather than going out and finding the Death Eaters responsible for murdering that girl's mother! Well I feel fucking safe here - what about the rest of the country?"

It was the first time Harry had seen Remus look anything other than calm and composed, his face had paled to a deathly white and his hands were shaking.

"So just - just leave her alone," ranted Harry, "before people other than the Order start getting curious!"

Remus didn't say anything, staring at him for a long time. Harry couldn't figure out whether he was angry with him or upset, but eventually he began to stride out of the room, long muggle overcoat

billowing slightly. When he reached the door that Harry was stood at, holding open for him he paused.

"I'm just trying to look out for you Harry," said Remus slowly, hurt showing in his eyes for the first time.

"Why?" he yelled furiously, pouring all his anger that he had for the Order and the war into the man standing in front of him, "You're not Sirius ok? I don't want you to look out for me! You were never here for me, Sirius had his excuse, WHAT WAS YOURS!"

Remus took a slightly step backwards, looking at Harry as if he'd seen him for the first time.

"I was on my own my whole life with those people," said Harry through gritted teeth, jabbing a finger out of the door and downstairs, "Where were you then, when I needed someone!"

Harry breathed deeply, staring unblinkingly into Remus's eyes which had clouded over, an unnameable emotion flickering through then. Harry hoped it was anger or pain, anything to make his fathers supposed best friend feel something for his son, he was sick of Remus being as unemotional and detached from him as the next random person on the street.

"I don't need you to look after me, and I don't want you to look after me," he finally said, hissing his words as he glared at the man, "You will never be anything approaching family to me."

Remus reeled back, looking desperately as if he wanted to say something. Harry almost urged him on eagerly, desperate to know what Remus thought about him, for him to say something, defend himself...But at the last moment he bit back his tongue and with a final look at Harry, strode out of the room. Harry slammed the door shut and leant against it, closing his eyes wearily.

He was so confused, the ache in his heart had grown till he found it hard to breathe again. He slid down the door and sat on the floor, resting his forehead against his knees - he needed to talk to someone. He needed to explain what he was feeling - the loss and guilt of

Sirius's death pressing down on him, the burden of the prophecy, his lack of connection with the magical world. He wanted to explain why it meant so much to him to keep Kitty's identity a secret, why he never wanted the Order to find out, what being with her made him feel.

He gave a heavy sigh and climbed to his feet, head still spinning as he sat at his desk. He pulled the bundle of cloth towards him and pulled the half finished mirror. He traced the cracks with his finger, the need to explain, to talk to Sirius, was more intense than he'd ever felt.

"Sirius," he whispered into the mirror, "I'm sorry...I'm so sorry..."

He could feel his throat tightening, the words jumbling up in his head, he had to sort it out.

"I'm going to try and explain to you Sirius," he choked out, "if you'll listen to me...maybe one day you'll be able to begin to forgive me..."

And so he told him everything. Speaking to the mirror for what seemed like hours, explaining about the Department of Mysteries, the Prophecy, Voldemort, Kitty, all his fears and his worries, the deepest secrets he'd been carrying. He knew Sirius wasn't at the end of the mirror, he'd never even felt Sirius's presence since he'd disappeared, but in some small way it helped. He felt like a little of the pressure that was squeezing his heart lessen, a small patch of the terrible gaping hole in his soul disappear. He actually found himself almost enjoying explaining about Kitty, telling Sirius that he'd like her, the sense of humour, the individuality, the 'chronic liar'.

But despite all that the anger against the Order remained, the bitterness he felt against the prophecy, against what Dumbledore wanted him to become. It was like a focal point, all the fear, the anger, the hate for Voldemort and the Death Eaters was channelled into one place; the need to get out.

"I'm going away tomorrow night," he told his reflection of the dirty mirror, reaffirming it himself as much as Sirius, "I won't let it destroy me like it did my parents, like it did you. I'm going to get out."



## Chapter Five

No one bites back as hard,  
On their anger,  
None of my pain and woe,  
Can show through.

Remus walked into the kitchen in silence and Tonks and Moody looked up at him. She knew at once that something was wrong, Remus was pale, shaking and hadn't seemed to even notice they were sitting there watching him. He walked over to the dresser and pulled out Sirius's half finished bottle of Ogden's Firewhiskey. He poured himself a large shot and Tonks and Moody shared a significant look, deeply disturbed - they had never seen him like this before; it seemed most out of place.

"Remus?" asked Tonks tentatively.

He gave a start and looked across to them, half way through pouring himself a second shot and gave a nod, as if to acknowledge their presence.

"What happened Remus?" she asked, wandering over to him, looking concerned.

"I can't do these visits anymore," said Remus in a steady voice as he walked over to the table completely bypassing Tonks.

"What?" asked Tonks, sounding alarmed, "Why? What happened?"

Remus shook his head and stared straight ahead of him, obviously not seeing what he was looking at.

"That boy is just so..." he began slowly, unable to think of the proper word and slumping into his chair opposite Moody, whose scarred face was twisted into a knowing smirk.

"Give them an inch, they take a mile," he said, nodding at his own wise words.

Remus shook his head again and Tonks slid into the seat opposite him, staring at him avidly.

"What happened?" she breathed, eyes wide.

Remus was silent and Tonks shuffled forward in her seat.

"Alastor," said Remus after a few minutes of silence, "I'm officially asking to be taken off visiting duty, I can't do them anymore."

"We can put you on guard duty instead," he said without question.

She fidgeted in her seat, looking desperately like she wanted to ask Remus what had happened, but refused to do so with Moody hanging around.

"Did you find out anything about Our Girl?" he asked, leaning across the table with interest.

"Oh yes," said Remus almost bitterly, "she was there."

"We know that," said Tonks, looking worried, "Verne called in just after you left."

"So, what did you find out? Who is she?" pressed Moody.

"He wouldn't say," said Remus, taking another deep swig of drink, "basically I have been told that the Order are to stop chasing after Our Girl and holding him prisoner in his own home and to start chasing after Death Eaters and murderers instead. A better use of our time he thinks."

Tonks raised her eyebrows at him in surprise, Moody however was unmoved.

"Did you manage to speak to her?" he asked briskly.

"No, she made her excuse and left as soon as I turned up, said she'd see him around and that she had to 'go and see a man about a dog'."

"Ah-ha!" cried Moody at once, "they're using code words already! What other secrets must they be keeping?"

"Don't be stupid Mad-Eye," said Tonks, rolling her eyes, "it's a muggle expression, it means you've got to go and do something important."

"Muggle expression or not, what do you think this important thing she had to go and do was, eh?" said Moody, looking like all his Christmases had come at once.

"Mad-Eye," began Tonks exasperatedly, "I really think all we're talking about here is a girl that Harry's got feeling for, nothing else."

"I don't buy this whole relationship lark," he sniffed impatiently, "it's just a cover and you know it!"

Suddenly there was a burst of flame above the table and a second later a roll of parchment dropped out of it onto the table.

"Verne," said Tonks, reaching forward and unrolling the parchments.

A slow smile spread across her face as she handed them to Moody.

"Just a cover story eh?" she asked sweetly as he and Remus looked down at the sheaf of photo's.

It was Harry and the person they'd all come to nickname Our Girl kissing on the doorstep. It was a magical photo and Remus watched open mouthed as they parted as she began to walk down the drive. He looked across to Tonks who had a triumphant look in her eyes.

"I told you. He's in love!"

It wasn't until that night as he was climbing into bed that he noticed two things sitting on his bedside table. The first was a small bottle of coca cola, which he picked up with a grin - typical Kitty. The second was sitting underneath the bottle; a small brown envelope with the words 'Harry - FYEO' written on it in biro. With a puzzled look at it (he had no idea what FYEO meant) he opened it and pulled out a tatty piece of paper that had obviously come from a spiral bound notebook, a quick glance down at the signature told him it was indeed from Kitty.

He lay down on his bed and began to read the letter, wide grin on his face.

Dear Harry,

You'd have got this letter in one of two ways I guess, either my well-thought out attempt to get into your house didn't work and the police was called, in which case this has been posted, or I actually managed to get in and I left this in your room. Either way - you're obviously reading this so mission accomplished (not spelled right I know).

Harry paused, laughing at her tone. She wrote just how she spoke.

Anywho, enough of the rambles. This letter was my attempt at being serious if I didn't manage to be so today (which is probably likely yeah?). I just wanted to tell you that I am not in fact insane, although at times it may seem like that, and I'm sorry if you think I'm being a weird stalker type coming to your house and all that. I found your address out from some guys we used to go to school with, they knew Dudley. I was going to explain why I came over right about now, but I'm still not really sure - is it enough to say I just wanted to see you again felt like it? Feel free to laugh out loud at this point, I did.

He stopped again, his stomach giving a pleasant lurch at the thought. He quite liked the fact that she had the same trouble in placing her finger on what exactly was going on.

I'm really not very good at writing stuff like this, there's a special word for it isn't there, when you can't say the thoughts you have in your head? Anyway, if you didn't think I was mad before, you do now. And while your opinion of me is low, I'm going to get the point. I didn't believe you in the park when you said people could be listening or watching us, I just said you were being paranoid. But I saw that woman come after you as soon as you left, and I watched you arguing with her as she walked you away. I don't pretend to understand what the hell is happening, what you could have possibly done that would mean you should be followed or watched or whatever.

Maybe you're the ones that insane, hey?

But I do know this - everything I said to you in the park was the God honest truth. Harry, I can see your unhappiness, anyone could if they took two seconds to look at you properly. And I know it must be something more than your Aunt and Uncle, why else would you not want to go back to school? I didn't buy any of that crap about not being able to pay fees - like they'd spend any money on you anyway. I also know you've been thinking of getting out long before we met, maybe you're already planning it now and I want you to know that if you do, you come to me ok? I'm going to give you my address so that when you get out you come here straight away right, I can help you, you know I can.

So now my reputation as a madwoman is fully cemented you can make up your own mind. If you decide I'm being way too pushy since we only just met then forget about it, and I wish you all the luck in the world, whatever happens. But if you decide the other way, you know where to come.

Anyway, better go, gotta go see a man about a dog,

Kitty.

Harry dropped the letter to his lap and stared at it for a long time. What was he supposed to think about all that? She had guessed so much about him from only a few meetings, how long would it be until he couldn't keep his story up? Despite the warning bells that went off in his head he found himself not caring, there was something about her, something that made him brush aside all thoughts of the pain and sadness he'd been wallowing in since she'd left, that little bit of light.

He looked back at the letter, rereading it a few times. He thought it was quite sweet the way she'd try and say something meaningful and serious, but overbalanced it with wisecracks or self-mocking comments, as if this would make it more acceptable to him if he thought she was prying. She had jotted down her address as well and he studied it intently, trying to commit it to memory.

Flat 18d,  
Mandela House,  
Towers Street,  
Crawley  
Surrey

At the same time as Harry was reading his letter from Kitty, a large proportion of the Order were finishing a meeting and we're now sitting around the dinner table, waiting for another feast from Mrs Weasley, who was fluttering around the kitchen impatiently batting away the others attempt to help. She reflected upon the latest news, of Harry's new girlfriend, with deep suspicion - the girl in the photograph was not someone she'd want to see Harry associating with and she agreed with Moody that something ought to be done. She was just serving up dinner when Tonks turned up. Molly carefully pushed the knife that was leaning on the side of the table out of her reach, Merlin only knew what trouble she could wreak with that thing.

"Do you need any help Molly?" she asked, face full of sincerity and eagerness to please.

She chuckled to herself, the only reason she was trying to be so helpful was because Charlie had arrived at the dinner table.

"No I'm fine dear, you just sit down and have a rest, you've had a busy day," she said kindly, ladling out the gravy in copious amounts onto the plates of beef and veg.

"As have you," she pointed out, pushing her pink hair behind her ear self-consciously, "please, I'd like to do something."

"He won't notice you unless you're 30 ft long, have scales and breath fire dear," she said, trying to be as kind, and as blunt, as possible.

"What?" she said blankly, before realisation dawned and she went red, "that's got nothing to do with it...I just wanted to help..."

"Of course dear," said Molly, patting her lightly on the shoulders, "just you sit down."

"I could take Remus his dinner?" she suggested hopefully.

"I think it's best to leave Mr Lupin alone right now, don't you think?" asked Molly, questioning tone subtly hiding the fact it was a statement.

"He'll be hungry," she said, trying to inject a little bit of authority into her voice too, "and it might help him sober up. I'll only be a second."

She held out her hands, waiting for the plate and Molly could do nothing but sigh and hand her a serving. Tonks took off at high speed, but didn't trip once.

She padded up the wooden stairs, trying to ignore the leering heads of the house-elves staring down at her as she made her way to the top of the house. She paused outside the door to the room Remus was in, partly to gain her composure from the high climb, and partly because she was about to enter the place that had been out of bounds for over a month; Sirius's room.

Hesitantly, she raised her hand to the door and gave it a quick rap of the knuckles. She paused but there was no reply, so she tried again and this too was greeted by stony silence.

"Remus?" she tried in a quiet, yet reassuring voice, "I've bought you some dinner...can I come in?"

Silence.

"I'm coming in ok?"

She gulped slightly and opened the door, which creaked loudly on its hinges. She winced at the noise and stuck her head around the door to find her nose instantly invaded by two smells, the first was the

smell of an abandoned room, musty and unlived in, the second was Firewhiskey. She walked in slowly, eyes falling on Remus, who was slumped on the floor, back propped up against the bed as he stared unseeingly at the carpet.

"I bought you some dinner," she tried again, wondering if she was about to be yelled at, "we missed you at the meeting."

"Didn't feel like coming," he said, giving a slight laugh and still staring at the patch ahead of him.

"Mind if I come in?" asked Tonks.

"Would you do anything but?" he said, raising the glass to his mouth again in a mechanical action.

She sat down on the floor next to him and propped her own back up against the bed, feeling overcome by the surroundings. Sirius's room looked exactly the same as the instant he'd dropped everything and headed over to the Department of Mysteries, a cloak lay tossed over the chair to his desk, his bed was still unmade, there was a half-finished cup of now-moulding tea on the bedside table. Tonks found the surroundings unbearable to cope with, the great weight Sirius's death had left them all with was suffocating with all these reminders littered about the room so carelessly, a shoe at the base of the bed, an old sock that had missed the laundry basket, a small book sitting on the table, opened and marked at a certain page.

"Look what I found," said Remus, showing her something with a heavy, lidded look in his eyes.

Tonks took the sheaf of parchment from his hand and looked at it - it was a letter to Harry, half-finished.

Congratulations on surviving your OWLS!

"He couldn't remember the charm to make the ink flash like that..." began Remus, voice breaking slightly, "he had to ask me..."



"Oh Remus," said Tonks, unwelcome tears springing to her eyes, "it's not good for you to be up here..."

"You know Sirius wouldn't want us to be like this," he began loudly, as if speaking to a third party spectre in the room, "he'd think we were just being miserable, he'd be so angry with me for it..."

His voice, which had been steadily worsening as he spoke, gave out and he had to cut off, taking time to give a great sniff and take another drink.

"He wouldn't be angry with you," said Tonks gently, "not for being sad, don't think that..."

"He would be angry with me!" he protested, tears welling up in his eyes, "I'm no good, I can't do it - I can't be like him!"

"No ones asking you too," said Tonks, placing a consoling hand on his shoulder.

"But they are! They want me to speak to Harry, ask him things, be his new godfather, but I can't!" he said, stumbling over his words through the befuddled mind of alcohol, "Harry doesn't even like me!"

"He does like you Remus," she told him firmly, "he always said you were his best teacher!"

"I don't want to be his teacher anymore! That was three years ago and if anything we're less friendly now than we were then!" he said, tears splashing down his cheeks, surprising Tonks.

"Harry's been through a lot Remus, loosing Sirius like that-"

"- I lost Sirius too!" he said loudly, gesticulating wildly with his glass, "Sirius was my best friend, not his! I knew him over twenty years longer than Harry did, so why can't I be the one who can't cope! Why can't I be the one who grieves for their closest friend lost too early?"

"You can," she told him, crying now too, "it's not a competition for the privilege to grieve...we can all do it together..."

He shook his head heavily, looking down into his glass and realising that it was empty with a start. He poured himself another, taking a deep gulp before wiping his nose on his cuffs.

"Is this about what happened today at the house..." she prompted, watching his drunken stupor with a tearful frown.

"Yes," he muttered into the rim of the glass.

"Did you argue?" she continued, wanting to keep up the conversation, hoping Remus could get what was bothering him off his chest.

"No, Harry just shouted at me and I listened," he said, before giving a bitter laugh, "he's just like James, he always knew if he shouted loud enough I wouldn't argue back. And Sirius, Sirius knew..."

"You need to stand up for yourself then Remus," Tonks told him slowly, "don't just stand around and take it from them."

"No matter to me," he said, muttering deeply under his breath now, "they're all dead anyway, James, Sirius, Peter probably, I'm the only one left now...last Marauder, all alone..."

"You're not alone Remus," she said, wrapping an arm around his shoulder, trying to offer what little comfort she could, "make the effort with Harry, he may not be James but he's the closest you're going to get for a while."

"I don't want to make the effort with Harry," he said angrily, wiping his eyes with the back of his hand again, "if it wasn't for him none of this would have happened!"

"Remus don't say things like that -" she began, shocked at his outburst.

"Why not? It's true! Everyone's thinking it, I'm just saying it!" he continued ranting, "we all know Sirius wouldn't be dead now if it wasn't for him, if he'd kept up his lessons with Snape instead of letting pigheaded foolishness get in the way! If he'd have been smart

enough to realise it wasn't a vision! If he'd trusted Snape! If he'd looked in the mirror! If he hadn't gone to that place! Sirius would still be here...he'd still be here..."

Tonks gaped in shock at the usual calm, mild mannered man who was raging here in front of her one minute, breaking down the next. She couldn't think of anything to say, sure they all knew the details of that night, but Harry really hadn't had any choice in the events, they unfolded with sickening simplicity towards Voldemort's goal, another wizard duped with fatal consequences, not for the first, or last, time.

"It's not fair," said Remus hoarsely, running a shaking hand through his hair, "that he should be gone and I'm still here - why leave the most useless one here..."

"You're not useless," tried Tonks.

"I don't want him to be dead," Remus cried plaintively, as simple as a small child, "he didn't deserve to die, it wasn't his time...I want him to be alive again..."

"That's not going to happen," she whispered, tightening her arms around the broken man.

"I want him back," he choked out as she pulled him into a comforting embrace, "more than anything in the world..."

"I know," Tonks replied, smoothing down his hair as the tears rolled down her face, "I know."

Harry was lying stretched out on his bed, staring at the ceiling, his head nearly exploding at the thoughts which were blasting through it too quick to register. In his hand he held the letter that had been delivered only a few minutes ago by an unknown eagle owl. He had been heavily suspicious to begin with, and had opened it flinching. When the parchment had slipped out, he'd felt slightly foolish for his nerves, but now he felt like he had to hold it at arms length, such was the power the words held over him.

Quick as a flash Harry jumped to his feet and began to pace the room. He daredn't look at the letter, just in case the words had changed by some cruel act of spite. However, after a few more seconds of furious movement around the room he bit the bullet and brought it up to his face, reading it quickly with eyes darting from side to side, trying to burn a hole in the parchment.

Dear Mr. Potter.

My name is Antonius Quibell, I am what you would term an 'Unspeakable' and I work for the Department of Mysteries.

Harry dropped the letter to his side. It still read the same as before and the fire in his belly seemed to grow, fed by the fuel the words had provided him with. His spine seemed to be tingling with the anticipation of finishing the letter and he brought it to his face again, licking his dry lips as he continued.

You may wonder why I am writing to you, and it is because of this; I know that you were part of the resistance that fought against the Death Eaters and the Dark One in my chambers, and I know you're connection with the one within the Veil.

Here Harry stopped again, throwing the letter onto his bed and staring at it furiously. What did this mean, how did this man know about Sirius being in the veil, how could he possibly know? Unable to tear himself away from the letter however, he all but threw himself onto the parchment.

I cannot tell you all I would like to say, all that you need to hear within the parchment. The best I can do is to show you...show you what you must desperately want to see. You need to understand what the veil is, what it means to be within the veil, this I can tell you.

It was too fantastical. Harry couldn't believe what the man was trying to tell him, he wanted to, but he couldn't...

I have seen the one in the veil, and I have spoken to him and I can tell you what they said. You must meet with me, you must know. You cannot speak to anyone about this, those at the ministry and your

colleagues will not approve, and as you understand, my job dictates secrecy. Those that go by the name of unspeakables, are silenced.

I give you my address, if you want to know, then come to me. If you do not want to know, I will understand. Destroy this letter once you have read it and never speak about it.

Antonius Quibell.

It had to be a set up, this was just another of Voldemort's plans to get to him. What better way to get past the protections of the Order, Hogwarts and Privet Drive than by appealing to his grief for Sirius? All this Harry's brain told him, and all this his heart ignored. Yes it could be a ploy, but it sounded so much like one it couldn't be, it just sounded so unbelievable, so obvious, surely if Voldemort's were trying to trick him into escaping, he could think of a better reason than that?

And anyway, Harry was running away already, what harm could there be in checking out Quibell's story? And if it were true...

Harry couldn't dare to dream what this man might be able to tell him...

What the veil is, what it means to be within the veil...

He'd spoken to Sirius. Then man said it right there, plain as day, I have spoken to the one behind the veil...that meant Sirius was, as Harry had always truly believed, alive.

Alive, and able to talk. He could explain everything, find a way to get him out of there. At that moment in time, Harry wanted nothing more than to have Sirius back, to see him standing there next to him in his room, worrying about his health, what was going on outside and within Hogwarts. He wanted him back so badly it was almost too painful to bear.

He needed to speak to someone, stop this feeling like he was about to explode from all the knowledge. He wanted someone to explain this feeling to.

He realised with a start that he wanted Kitty there.

“HARRY!” shrieked his aunts voice and Harry glared at the door.

How dare she talk to him at a time like this!

He stood silent, letter still clutched in his hand.

“HARRY!” came her voice again.

He threw himself at the door and quite unexpectedly shouted, “What!”

“It’s the phone for you,” she said coldly, looking at him as if he’d just made a grave mistake, which he would pay for later - when he was out of earshot of the Order perhaps.

It was her, wasn’t it?

Harry just knew it was Kitty and he all but galloped down their stairs towards his aunt. He’d just been thinking about her, right at that moment, and now she was here on the phone, just when he needed her, he could talk about the letter.

Harry took the phone from his aunt’s hand, who was glaring at him evilly now and turned his back to her.

“Hello?” he asked in a breathless, excited voice.

“Hi Harry,” said a voice, sounding slightly nervous, “it’s me.”

Harry couldn’t have deflate quicker than he if he were Aunt Marge in a pin factory, the disappointment of the voice on the end of the line not belonging to Kitty was like a punch in the gut.

“Hermione,” stated Harry glumly, losing interest in the conversation before it had even begun.

“Hi Harry,” she repeated, sounding even more anxious now at his tone of voice, “how are you?”

He felt like saying; terrible, horrible, awful...I can't believe you're calling me at a time like this...I can't believe you're not Kitty...I can't believe I'm disappointed to hear from you...what's wrong with me?

"Fine," was what he actually said.

"Did Remus give you my book?" she asked.

Their conversation was so strained, so awkward....

"Yeah, thanks," he said, frowning at the wall in front of him as he cradled the phone under his chin, "I haven't had chance to look yet."

"Oh, ok."

She sounded hurt, and Harry was almost shocked at himself to find he wasn't that bothered.

"So, Harry..." she began, obviously casting around for conversation, "what have you been up to?"

He almost smiled at the blank wall in front of him. She didn't know, they hadn't told her about Kitty....Harry knew what Hermione would sound like if she wanted to talk about something like Kitty, and this wasn't it. He remembered her last year, she'd just come right out and asked about Cho, it was Ron who couldn't talk.

He grinned to himself – why hadn't Hermione or even Ron been told about Kitty (because you could be sure that if one knew, the other would find out soon enough). He would have thought that would be the first place the Order looked after him for answers.

"Oh, you know..." said Harry finally, being deliberately vague, "not much...you?"

"Well that's what I wanted to speak to you about," she said and Harry gave a grin of recognition- he knew that tone of voice from Hermione.

“What’s up?” he said, looking down at the pad of paper by the phone and investigating the notes jotted on it.

“Well I’m going on holiday tomorrow,” she said in a rush, “you know the one I told you about - to France?”

“Yeah,” said Harry distantly, wondering who Bernie was, and why Uncle Vernon had to ring him back between 5.12 and 5.38. It seemed a very random number.

“Well, I just want you to know, that if you need me here, I won’t go, I can stay with Ron I’m sure...”

All this came in the usual Hermione rush but Harry couldn’t help but feel strangely touched by this. He stopped looking at the pad and stared at the wall again, why would she give up a holiday to stay around for him? Was everyone that worried about him?

“I’m fine Hermione,” he said stolidly, “go on holiday, visit museums, eat cheese, have fun.”

She gave a slight laugh. He wished he could add, ‘tell me how it feels’ but didn’t think it was appropriate.

“Ok...if you’re sure?” she said, sounding thoroughly relieved by his ability to crack jokes.

He looked down at the parchment still in his hands, almost jumping at the sight of it. He seemed to have convinced himself that if he didn’t look at it every minute it would cease to be real and become some sort of dream.

Harry nodded at the parchment, “I’m sure.”

Why wasn’t he going to tell her about it? Because he knew what she’d say? What that meant...

“Ok,” she breathed, failing to hide her relief, “we, er, we missed you the other day, at Diagon Alley...”



He gave a sigh, he knew she'd try and get around to this.

"Yeah," he said neutrally, obviously dissuading any further questioning.

Hermione heard this and there was a slight pause, then, "Ron and Dean had a fight – he was at Diagon Alley too."

"Oh yeah?" asked Harry, cheering up slightly at this, "did he win?"

"I think so," she said thoughtfully, "but Ginny stopped them before it got bad...Got a bit of a black eye – Mrs Weasley was so angry she's left it there and refuses to heal it..."

Harry chuckled to himself, imagining Ron's reaction to seeing Dean through the crowd.

"Yeah, he's grounded now..." said Hermione, sounding disapproving at Ron's behaviour, "Dean's taking Ginny to a football match tomorrow and Ron's being locked in his room while he comes...How childish is that?"

"Sounds like Ron to me," said Harry with a laugh.

"Yeah, well..." she said with huff, "you'd think he'd have better things to worry about..."

Harry felt his mood that was approaching happiness dissipate instantly, all at once he knew what Hermione was referring to.

"The whole families off doing things all over the place," she said quietly, "I think most days it's just him and Ginny at home..."

"Aw, poor Ron," said Harry sarcastically causing Hermione to be silent for a few moments.

When she spoke again she sounded annoyed at him.

"Well, I think you just might like to think what they're doing and then you might know why he's so worried."

Harry was silent now too, feeling suitably rebuked but desperately holding his tongue back at the tirade of 'how unfair is it that' he wanted to say.

Maybe they were right, he had changed.

"Anyway, Charlie and Bill are back now," she said.

"Everyone but Percy, huh?" he mused and heard her give a snort of disapproval.

"Yes, well. He made his choice," she said stiffly.

Harry didn't say anything, his gaze was drawn back to the letter in her hand, maybe Hermione would know this Antonius Quibell, or Ron, his dad worked at the Ministry after all. But he wasn't going to ask them, was he? He already knew deep down in his heart he wasn't going to tell his best friends anything.

But he'd consider telling a perfect stranger.

Who you kissed, he reminded himself, or who kissed you...

"I've got a works experience placement when I get back off holiday."

"Oh yeah?" asked Harry vaguely, not feeling surprised at all at Hermione's eagerness to start work, "where at?"

"Oh, Ron's dad had a friend in Magical Beings department – I thought it would be a good place to test my theories on Elfish welfare," she sounded like she was trying to batten down her excitement.

Harry fought to stop the roll of his eyes, "Sounds perfect Hermione."

"Yeah, I-" she began before he heard a voice in the background and Hermione's muffled reply, "yes, I'm just coming, salmon please, hang on...Listen Harry I have to go."

"Don't we all?" he said and she was silent for a moment.

“Right, well. I’ll see you when I get back from France.”

No you won’t.

“Ok.”

“And I’ll send you a postcard.”

You won’t find me here.

“Thanks.”

“Look after yourself Harry. I mean it.”

If only you knew.

“I will.”

“Bye.”

“Goodbye Hermione.”

Harry put down the phone and stared at it for a long time. Harry lay on his bed, staring up at the snitch, which was darting about the place. It made him feel like playing Quidditch, and this made him think of his plan to run away, which automatically made him think of Kitty. He’d kissed her, or she’d kissed him, he couldn’t quite remember now, but he couldn’t help feeling that this was a Big Thing. After the veritable disaster his foray into dating provided with Cho, he couldn’t fully comprehend being with someone who didn’t sob all over his shoulder and make him feel clueless.

Then again, he countered, Kitty made him feel more clueless than Cho ever could – all she had to do was start talking about anything to do with the muggle world and he felt slightly on edge, a little lost...Most of the time he didn’t have a clue what she was talking about, but he didn’t actually seem to care.

He realised he should have been going over tomorrow nights plan again, but every time he did he found his thoughts returning to her. He'd already decided he would visit her before he left Surrey, but realised that this would mean saying goodbye, which he really didn't want to have to do. The snitch dive bombed across the room suddenly and he watched it, idea forming in his mind.

"Work, damn you," he said thoughtfully, and the snitch fluttered down to him, hovering at eye height.

He went over the idea in his head again, before giving a shrug – what was the harm?

"Show me Kitty – Catherine Earl."

It darted out of the window instantly and he flipped up the lid of the box, watching the snitches dizzying progress and it fluttered away down the street. He wondered suddenly if Mrs Figg would see, before trying to decide whether a squib could see things like that. However, it passed her house without incident and he watched the box for about five minutes as it flew across the houses, wondering if it had a distance limiter.

Before he could decide however, he saw it slowing down, descending upon what looked like a small car park. He squinted at it, realising in time that it was the basketball court in the park near him and that on it was a solitary player. He shuffled onto his elbows as he watched her curiously, bouncing the ball against the tarmac before shooting for the hoop.

She missed and wandered over to find the ball. She didn't seem to be fully concentrating on anything, and instead of shooting she merely walked along in any old direction, bouncing the ball. He smiled to himself, she was actually really pretty, he'd never stopped to think before.

The snitch gave a sudden close up of her and he was worried to see she had a deep frown on her face, but that's not all it showed. It darted past her arm as she ran for the hoop again and he saw a large bruise there, almost black against her white vest top.

Harry couldn't help but feel this was very ominous, and watched her for a few more minutes as she passed the time, throwing the ball with increasing violence at the hoop. At one point the whole stand vibrated with the force and the wood creaked slightly as she shouted out in frustration, strangely muted through the snitch box.

He suddenly felt like maybe he'd passed the line between testing a theory and spying and was about to recall the snitch when a sudden change in her mood seemed to take place. Giving a silent sigh, she wandered over to the ball, picking it up and balancing it between her hip and her wrist and merely stood at the chain fence, waiting.

For a long time he couldn't figure out what she was waiting for, before it suddenly dawned on him. She was waiting for him to come and visit the park again. It occurred to him that this was a little strange before getting another look at the expression on her face instantly dismissed this, she was lonely...

He almost got up to go to the park before he realised how impossible this was, it was getting dark out and there would be no way that the Order would let him out now and even then they'd follow. After a long time spent just staring through the chain-link, Kitty looked at her watch, grabbed her coat and trudged out of the park.

Tonks waited until the girl had walked past her and was almost at the bus stop when she began to follow her, settling into a suitable walking style as she became accustomed to her new appearance - it'd been a while since she'd found it necessary to appear younger and being 16 again was quite fun.

However, before she got too carried away she reminded herself what she was doing and focussed her attention on the girl in front of her. She was wearing baggy trousers and a black coat, absentmindedly bouncing a ball along the street and Tonks wondered why she was trudging so wearily. They soon came to a bus stop and the girl slumped onto the bench, holding her face in her hands.

Tonks leaned against the bus shelter too, making every appearance of waiting for a bus, whilst watching the girl surreptitiously out of the corner of her eye. She couldn't tell, but she thought that the girl was

upset, she certainly had a weary look about her and Tonks decided to make her move.

“Hey, you ok?” she asked in her best impersonation of the local accent.

The girl lifted her head slightly, looked at Tonks through her spread fingers.

“Fine,” she said after a couple of seconds.

The way she said it left no room for further questioning, or left Tonks in any doubt that this girl wanted you to know she was absolutely 100.

“Know when the next bus is?” she asked, hoping to keep her engaged in conversation.

“There’s a time table right next to you,” she replied, before turning away and pulling out a pack of cigarettes.

“Right,” she said hastily, turning to pretend to read it.

And that was that, the girl was remarkably guarded and it seemed like she wasn’t going to get anywhere with her at all. When she turned around the girl was smoking, slouched down in her chair and staring off into the distance, if only she could find a way in, but every conversation starter Tonks thought of died in her throat when she realised how stupid they sounded.

Finally the bus rolled around the corner and the girl got up, throwing the butt to the floor and climbing aboard. Tonks eavesdropped on her destination and repeated this when she got to the bus driver, choosing a seat across from the girl.

Moody would kill her if she didn’t get any good information.

However, just at that moment an overly large woman sat down next to her and boxed her in, effectively cutting her off. Tonks grimaced and idled away the 20 minute journey by staring out of the window, formulating ideas. This girl lived quite some distance away she

realised, and had travelled all this way, just to hang out at a park near where Harry lived. Was he supposed to be meeting her or was she just waiting, in the chance that he might have gone? Either way it was curious, and by the expression on the girls face, Tonks realised she could probably have done with someone to talk to.

Suddenly, the bell was being pushed and the girl was getting off and Tonks had to fight to make it off in time too. This time she let a little bit of distance between her and the girl as she decided she wouldn't be able to talk to her and it was just best she got an address, something Bill could work with in the Muggle Records Department.

She'd been dodging and weaving through the throngs of people returning home from work and heading into the centre of the town, which was only a few streets away when she lost sight of the girl. She cursed herself and wandered on anyway, about to turn back when a voice surprised her.

"If I didn't know any better, I'd swear you were following me."

Tonks spun around to see the girl sitting cross-legged on a low wall outside a massive multi-storey building, giving her a challenging look.

"I could say the same about you," replied Tonks easily, not letting her surprise show.

"Following you's a lot harder when I'm in front," she replied and Tonks knew that somehow she'd guessed...

But that wasn't possible was it?

"Where are you heading?" she continued.

"I'm meeting my boyfriend in town," she lied smoothly, "in McDonalds. Some big drama I guess, calling me all the way over here."

"Really?" she nodded.

"Guys huh? Always something going on," she hinted hopefully.

"I suppose so."

Damn it, cursed Tonks, that was the perfect opportunity for her to say something about Harry.

"Better not keep him waiting," said the girl, looking at Tonks curiously.

"Best not, see you around," said Tonks, walking off at once.

She didn't once look back, because she knew that this would just cement her guilt with the girl. However, as soon as she rounded the corner out of sight she jumped amongst some trees in a large communal garden. Changing her appearance quickly to that of a haggard middle aged woman, she changed her clothes and quickly walk back towards the building she'd been sitting outside of. Sure enough, she got up, and instead of heading into the building, crossed the road and headed towards the identical one opposite.

She really did think she was being followed, noted Tonks with some surprise - paranoid much?

She entered to tower block just behind the girl, following her up the stairs slowly, making sure she didn't look at her once. Memorising the floor number, she followed her into one of the corridors, taking note of the flat numbers until the girl stopped outside one a let herself in.

Flat 18d, Tonks memorised, not stopping as she walked past.

Mission complete.

Kitty lay on the sofa in her room, staring at the ceiling. There was an interesting patch of mould that, if you squinted in just the right way, looked like a rabbit wearing a pointed hat. She spent a fruitful 10 minutes screwing her face into differing expressions as more thing became visible - a carrot, a nose that actually looked like an elephant trunk. It really was amazing what you could do to occupy yourself, take your mind of things.



Eventually however, she gave a heavy sigh and rolled onto her side, catching sight of her phone, illuminated in the dark. She wished she had Harry's number, she knew he had a phone, she'd seen it the day they'd met on the bus. Why hadn't he given it to her?

As if in answer to this her phone suddenly lit up and played a short ditty. She practically threw herself across the room for it, her heart hammering madly - it was him...she'd just been thinking about him and now he'd texted her...

She opened the message and practically yelled with frustration when she read the name of the sender.

Hey babe. Not seen u 4 a few dayz, where u bin ? Shud I b jealous of some1? I'm coming ova 2nite - Love M x

Kitty threw her phone back onto the sofa without replying. Then, after a few moments of staring at it angrily, she kicked out at the side of her desk, causing a stack of videos to wobble precariously before crashing to the floor.

She bit her thumb nail for sometime thinking, looking over to the bag propped up behind her door. There was no way she was going to be here if Micky was coming. She knew exactly where she wanted to be, she just didn't know why.

What was wrong with her?

She threw herself back onto the sofa and buried her head in her pillow and thought about yesterday. Then she thought about Micky coming over.

Then she grabbed her coat and left.

Tonks was sprawled out on the sofa of Grimauld Place chatting with Bill. She hadn't seen him for so long and it seemed a million years ago they'd all sat in the grounds of Hogwarts, happily insulting each other and making fun of Charlie.

But then again, something's never changed.

"That was so your fault!" she giggled as Bill shook his head at her.

"I seem to recall a little something called a 'babbling potion' accidentally ending up in his drink..." he mused with mock-innocence.

"Oh yeah! I wonder how that got there..." she said airily, before taking a swig of her hot chocolate and giving a contented sigh.

"He got you back though eh?" he pointed out, "how many points did you lose by?"

"Only 10," she said defensively, "and it was in the middle of a gale, and I did have a sprained wrist."

"Excuses excuses little sis," he laughed, "we whopped you're Ravenclaw arse."

"Chuh - you thought you were so clever eh? I got him back though," she reminded him.

"Ah yes, the-" began Bill before a sudden noise from the hall made them look up.

It was the sound of a book being dropped to the floor and they saw Remus wearily pick it up. He glanced into the lounge where they were, saw them, and without a single word or acknowledgment, trudged down the corridor. They waited until he was safely out of earshot before they began to talk about him.

"He's messed up huh?" said Bill in a low voice.

Tonks nodded heavily and watched the now empty doorway, remembering the dead expression on his face.

"It's Sirius..." she began, a look of pain flitting across her face, "I don't know..."

"What happened the other night?" he asked, shuffling closer to her.

“Well, you know he had an argument with Harry the other day?” she whispered, eyes trained on the door, just in case, “well I think he must have said something, about Sirius...he was completely plastered anyway...”

“Remus?” he asked incredulously, “drunk?”

“Yeah,” she nodded seriously, “as a skunk!”

“But Remus?” he asked her, “I’ve never seen a drop pass his lips, let alone getting that drunk?”

“He never had good enough reason until now,” she said heavily, before adding hastily, “or so I imagine.”

“Sirius,” said Bill heavily, “it was his best friend after all...I get the feeling he doesn’t have many, besides us lot, and we’re a ragtag lot.”

“Yeah I know,” she mused, glancing towards the direction he left again, “I think he might be embarrassed about talking to me now...”

“Drunken rambles are not good,” agreed Bill with a reminiscent laugh, “do you remember when we sneaked off to the muggle pub by us with Charlie and Camilla?”

“Oh yeah,” said Tonks, squealing with embarrassment, “what a night...didn’t you and Charlie try to climb over that hedge? Ended up in the slurry ditch!”

“I seem to recall you and Camilla tried a bit of midnight swimming in the river,” he replied airily and she laughed even more, “without clothes too. Mum would be scandalised.”

“Yeah, if she knew! Those were good times,” she sighed wistfully, “I miss them.”

“Yeah, when did it all get so serious eh?” he asked her.

"I suppose when we got old," she replied, thinking about Remus again, she wondered if he'd ever done anything reckless like skinny dipping in a freezing Devonian river or trying hedge vaulting.

"Less of the old," he replied affectionately, before notice the expression on her face, "why don't you go and speak to him? You know, initiate the conversation so he's not too embarrassed?"

"You think so?" she asked him with an anxious look towards the door.

"I reckon he could probably do with the company more right now?"

"Maybe...save the memories for later yeah?" she asked, already getting up, "I'll be right back."

Bill merely waved her off, picking up the nearby newspaper and beginning to read as Tonks wandered through the hall of Grimauld Place to the kitchens. She checked her appearance before she walked in, frowning slightly as she saw Remus at the table, chin cradled in his hand as he stared off at nothing.

"Wotcher Remus," she said, giving him a slight smile.

He jumped slightly and gave her a surprised looks.

"Oh, hello Tonks," he said, sounding flustered, "I, er, didn't see you there..."

"Practising my stealth," she joked, not surprised to see it went completely over his head.

He merely nodded and she decided to simply bite the bullet.

"How's your head?" she asked lightly.

"Oh," he said vaguely, cheeks flushing slowly, "not the best it's been."

"How about a coffee," was all she said, recognising his expectant air of reprimand or judgement.

He merely nodded gratefully, sinking into one of the chairs around the large kitchen table. Tonks found herself unconsciously looking for a kettle and coffee grains before the magical part of her woke up and reminded her about flicking a wand. She placed the mug in front of him, sitting on the table with her feet propped up on the chair next to him.

He was completely silent and she tried not to stare at him, sipping the coffee cautiously.

“Eugh,” she frowned instantly, “my coffee always tastes crap...”

He gave a flicker of a smile, before taking a sip himself. She saw him give a slight grimace, covering it up quickly with a polite look.

She began to laugh, “No need to be polite Remus! How about some real coffee?”

So she set about transfiguring a mug into a cafetiere, summoning some ground coffee and pouring boiling water from the tip of her wand into it.

“So,” she said as the coffee was left to stand, “what’s the next step with Our Girl and Harry?”

“I’m not quite sure,” he told her with a sigh, “I’m seeing Dumbledore tomorrow, he’ll tell us the best course of action. Meanwhile I guess we could visit her tomorrow, find out a little more about her?”

“Sounds like a plan man,” said Tonks, summoning over two mugs, “Ron’s coming over soon, we could ask him?”

“That’s an idea,” said Remus, perking up slightly, “Harry would tell them about her wouldn’t he?”

“He is a teenage boy after all,” added Tonks with a laugh, “with all that it entails.”

“Yeah, good times,” mused Remus thoughtfully.

She looked at him in surprise.

"I just said the exact same thing to Bill," she told him.

"Really?" he asked, smiling slightly, "being a teenager in Hogwarts, now that was always fun. Even if you did get into a certain amount of trouble."

"I bet," she reminisced, "I was always in some detention or another. I was sure Dumbledore was going to magically attach a 'disturbing the peace' sign on my head at once point."

"I'm surprised we weren't expelled sometimes," Remus added, "the stuff we got up to."

Tonks found herself watching Remus with a new found sadness, both James and Sirius were gone now, Peter was as good as gone, he was right, he was the only one left. It was just too sad, she reflected later on that evening as she thought about it, Remus really didn't have anyone else left.

"Ron," came a voice, causing him to spin around quickly.

"Professor Lupin," he said automatically, feeling somewhat surprised.

"I keep telling you Ron, I'm not your professor anymore," said the man easily, wandering into the room.

"Oh, right," he nodded quickly, looking around the room for inspiration, "is er, everything ok?"

"Yes yes, everything's fine," said the man reassuringly, "I just wanted a chat with you."

Ron knew exactly what this meant - when adults used words like 'chat' or 'talk' or 'discussion', it was a sure thing that they had discovered something that you'd done. No good ever came from having a chat.

"Really?" he said nervously, "only...I should probably help mum..."

Remus smiled at his reaction, causing Ron's nerves to increase - what had he done that would get him in trouble with his ex-professor?

"It won't take a minute," he said, sitting down on the musty bed.

"Right," he said morosely, standing in front of him, hands behind his back, "what's up?"

"I just wondered if you'd spoken to Harry recently?"

Ron almost sighed out loud in relief - it wasn't him that was in trouble after all! This was short lived however, as he could see the worry in the man's eyes.

"He hasn't replied to any of our letters," said Ron awkwardly, wondering if he should be divulging this information, "I think he just must be really busy..."

Professor Lupin looked at him as if to say 'what could Harry possibly be doing at the Dursley's?' and Ron had to admit, he was right. Harry was always saying how he was so bored there he was nearly tearing his hair out.

"Has Hermione heard from him either?" he asked.

"She spoke to him on the muggle thingy yesterday," he said, remembering Hermione's letter that now lay in his small trunk, explaining everything they'd talked about.

"Phone?" nodded Remus, before pausing to think, "How was he, did she say?"

Ron looked over to his trunk briefly, Hermione had been really upset about the conversation, she was really worried about his tone of voice she'd said, but somehow Ron didn't think telling the professor was a good idea.

"He was ok, bit bored," he said, before cursing himself - he'd just accused Harry of being too busy to communicate.

"He was ok?" asked Remus sceptically and Ron shrugged, "Only, I haven't seen him for a while now...bit of a misunderstanding really..."

"He bit your head off right?" asked Ron before he could stop himself.

Remus looked at him strangely.

"I mean, er, did you have an argument?" he corrected, tips of his ears turning red.

"Of a sort," he replied, looking at Ron as if he was rapidly forming an idea, "how's he been, since everything happened?"

"Oh, you know, getting on with things," said Ron vaguely, thinking back to the deterioration in his friends behaviour in the last month.

"Only Tonks told me what happened in Diagon Alley," he continued.

"Yeah, well...it was a mistake anyone could make," shrugged Ron, feeling intensely uncomfortable.

"Do you think so?"

To tell the truth it wasn't the kind of the mistake you'd make. Sirius was dead, they all knew that, so how could Harry even think he could see him, in Diagon Alley no less? Hermione had been even more upset that day and Ron couldn't help in sharing her fear, why had Harry gone running after that dog, why had he just left just like that, why wasn't he talking to them?

"You're worried about him, aren't you?" said Remus.

Ron looked over to the door, he really didn't want to talk about this now, especially to someone he generally knew as his old professor and vaguely knew as an Order member. He knew Remus was a friend of Harry's dad, but it wasn't the same talking to him as it was with Sirius.



Remus took his silence as an answer and gave him a comforting smile.

"It'll be ok," he told him and Ron fought to roll his eyes.

He obviously didn't know Harry that well.

"You don't think so?" noted Remus.

"Well, with all due respect sir," said Ron, wishing he hadn't started speaking, "Harry's not really the kind of person to get over things, if you know what I mean."

The man looked slightly downcast at this.

"But you know, I'm sure whatever you were fighting about will get sorted..." he said hopefully.

He merely nodded.

It should be the other way around Ron realised, Remus was supposed to be telling him this sort of stuff. He wondered what they had been fighting about, knowing already that it was connected to Sirius in some way. He also realised he almost wanted Remus to continue pressuring him into talking about Harry, he was even more worried now he'd come to speak with him especially when combined with his lack of post, Hermione's conversation with him and Diagon Alley.

"Just one more question Ron," he asked, derailing his train of thought.

"Yeah?"

"Does Harry keep in touch with any of his muggle friends?" he said.

Ron couldn't help but feel his eyebrows shoot up, ready to laugh out loud that Harry didn't have any muggle friends when the strangeness of the question caught his attention.

"What do you mean?" he asked in confusion, "Why?"

"Well, we've just seen him meeting with someone and wondered if you knew who it could be?" he asked hopefully.

"Harry doesn't have any muggle friends," he said, frowning at the man, "what do mean meeting with someone? Who?"

"A girl," he said and Ron frowned even more, "we think it might be his girlfriend."

"What!" he exclaimed loudly.

"She lives in the nearest muggle city," he said as Ron goggled wordlessly, "but she's been to visit him a few times. We were wondering if he'd said anything to you?"

"No, he hasn't," said Ron vaguely, looking off into the middle distance.

"Perhaps he might have mentioned her before?"

Ron shook his head again.

"Maybe you'll recognise her?" he asked, pulling a photo out of his robes.

Ron took it wordlessly. It was obviously taken outside the Dursley's house and he could see Harry standing in the open doorway, dressed in baggy muggle clothes. Ron was momentarily sidetracked by how tired and ill he looked before the girl began walking down the pathway. The first thing he noticed was her outrageous muggle clothes - massive baggy jeans and a tiny tight top - no wonder Harry likes her he thought vaguely. Then other details began to come into view, she had hair that looked just like Lee Jorden's, but was multicoloured instead, she had her lip and eyebrow pierced, she wore make-up...

"You don't recognise her then?" asked the voice.

Ron looked up quickly, having completely forgotten that Remus had been there waiting for him to speak. He looked back at the photo.

“No, I don’t,” he said in confusion, “I don’t understand...Harry’s got a muggle girlfriend?”

And can’t even be bothered to tell us about it, he added to himself.

“It is odd isn’t it?” nodded Remus almost to himself, “Oh well. Thanks for the help Ron, dinner’s probably ready soon.”

“Right, ok,” he said, watching the professor leave.

He flopped onto the bed, staring at the photo the man had forgotten to take back. How could Harry not tell them this? Why could he talk to some stranger, but couldn’t even be bothered to jot a note for an owl? He obviously really upset about Sirius he scoffed, if he’s already got himself a girlfriend.

After a restless few minutes of confused thought he jumped up, fetching a quill and some parchment;

To Hermione, You’ll never guess what I just found out...

He began to write, scratching out his conversation with Remus, describing the photograph, subtly making inferences about what he thought without saying anything too specific.

## Chapter Six

I have hours, only lonely,  
My love is vengeance,  
That's never free.

After all the worrying, the years of dreaming about it, the days spent planning it, running away from Number 4 Privet Drive was surprisingly easy. He'd been expecting his Uncle to find him creeping through the kitchen, some third, unknown guard springing him as he crept passed Mundungus' empty post, Ministry owl swooping down on him as he walked down Crocus Crescent. But no one was there, no one came, no one noticed.

For the first time in his life, Harry realised as he walked towards the bus stop, dodging in the shadows nonetheless, he was free - on his own. No one watching over him, telling him what to do, now he was free to do what he wanted to do, what he had to do.

He had to find out what happened to Sirius, he had to get out of the magical world before it swallowed him up, and this was the only way. It became his mantra as he gripped the wand in his pocket tightly, telling himself 'it's the only way' to keep himself from jumping out of his skin at every movement in the dark.

Finally he reached the bus stop and paused for breath, shrinking back into the shadows as much as he could whilst he looked around for followers. The timetable proclaimed the next bus to be arriving in 20 minutes, which he spent reading through Kitty's letter again, memorising the address and searching the shadows.

He couldn't quite believe that he'd done it - that it had been as simple as picking up a bag, waiting for the crack of Mundungus disappearing, and walking out of the back garden. Surely someone would have been alerted in some way?

As he got onto the bus and paid his fare, he couldn't help but thinking about his impending meeting with Kitty. He didn't want to have to say goodbye to her now, not when he seemed to have found the only

person in the world that it was possible to be with that didn't make his heart ache with the thought of what was happening around him.

He stared out the window of the bus, met with his reflection against the pitch black of outside. He looked pale, even to himself, causing his scar to stand out even more. Angrily he flattened his fringe against it and looked away, trying to rid his mind of the horrible memories that seemed to refuse to leave him.

He tried to clear his mind the way Snape had taught him in his Occlumency lessons, but found that every attempt was ruined by the sudden appearance of Kitty's face in his mind and the nerves in his stomach as he thought about meeting her again.

"Oi! It's your stop!"

Harry jumped slightly at the voice to see the bus driver glaring at him in the mirror. He looked around the bus which was empty and jumped to his feet.

"Sorry, I didn't realise," he apologised, jumping off.

"Yeah right," scoffed the man, slamming the doors on him muttering something about 'scroungers'.

Harry frowned at him, eyes drawn upwards as the bus drove away to meet to great grey edifice of Mandela House. The building had a looming presence, even in the dark and Harry stared at it for some time - somehow he just knew that Kitty would live in a place like this.

He set off towards the front doors, trying to ignore the butterflies in his stomach as he entered the hallway, greeted by a large flight of concrete steps. Floor 18 he thought grimly, beginning his slow trudge upwards. Even though it was nearly 1 'o' clock in the morning, the place seemed to be as busy as he'd have expected it during the day, various gangs of teenagers littering the stairs, watching him walk past with open hostility. He fancied he could hear a few whispered words but chose to ignore them.

Finally he reached the right floor, stepping out onto a corridor that was lined down one side with doors, with the other side open to the air, large courtyard below. He finally came to Kitty's home, taking a deep breath before knocking on the door with the dirty brass 18d and waiting impatiently.

There was a group of kids aged around ten sitting on the ledge to the building and were watching him with the fierce air of street kids. Harry shot them a look that he hoped conveyed the fact he wasn't intimidated or bothered about them and knocked the door again. He tried to look through the window next to the door but it was covered by a curtain on the inside and gave no clue whether anyone was in or not. He stepped back, unsure of what to do next.

"Cathy's not in," came a voice behind him.

Harry turned to look at the group of kids, one of whom was addressing him. He had a shaven head and a gold stud in his ear and was obviously the leader of the group.

"Who?" he asked.

"Cathy," said the boy, strong South London twang obvious in his accent, "she's at work, if that's who ya lookin for."

"Catherine Earl?" said Harry, wondering why she wasn't known as Kitty round here, "know when she'll be back?"

"Yeah," said the boy lazily and the group of kids sniggered loudly.

"Want to tell me?" he asked coolly, not liking being messed around by a little kid.

"When she finishes usually," he said and there was a bit more laughter, "she's over at the Greyhound and Rabbit."

"Still?" he asked, looking at his watch, it was nearly one a.m. now.

"She's a hard worker," drawled another, earning more laughs which Harry glared at.

"Where is it?" asked Harry.

"The bar at the Racetrack," said the boy, rolling his eyes as everyone laughed appreciatively, "don't ya know nuffin?"

"Thanks a lot," muttered Harry, turning away from the miniature Draco Malfoy and wandering back down the corridor.

He felt at a loss, unsure of what to do next. He couldn't leave without seeing her but could he hang around any longer? What if the Order found him missing already, they'd be all over this place in minutes. He was just beginning to descend the stairs to the next floor when a girl from the group he'd seen earlier appeared next to him.

"Oi mate," she said, tugging the back of his jumper impatiently.

"What?"

"Our Cathy's gonna be back any minute, you'd be best staying put," she said, giving him a toothy smile, "she finishes early of a Friday on account of her doin the double shift see."

"Oh, great," said Harry feeling surprised and excited all at once, "right - thanks a lot."

"No worries mate," she grinned, "and don't pay any notice of Spencer - he's a bit of a shit really."

Harry raised an eyebrow at her but she merely gave him another bright smile and a wink before racing back up the stairs. He hoisted his backpack and began to climb too, when he reached Kitty's floor he noticed the gang of kids had already disappeared. He went and sat on the ledge to the building as the kids had before and waited, ears straining for any sudden noise, he was half expecting the swish of robes or the crack of apparation, even a quick stunner, but none came.

Instead he listened to the noises of the building around him, down in the central courtyard there were various gang wars going on between

the kids and all around him he could hear people living out there lives, arguments, TV's and music blaring out, he'd never hear any approaching wizards in the din anyway. Nothing but looking at his watch would have told him it was the early hours of the morning.

After about twenty minutes he heard someone walking down the corridor and he looked down to see Kitty ambling down. His stomach gave a surprising lurch as he watched her, completely unaware of his presence as she smoked away. She was wearing a very short black skirt and a tight white shirt underneath a heavy parka which went past her knees. Her hair was piled crazily around her face, which was thick with make-up, in fact, Harry almost had to do a double take to recognise her. She was searching in her ever present bag for her keys now, cigarette balanced precariously on her lips.

"Hey," Harry announced, causing her to jump and whip round.

"Harry!" she exclaimed looking pleasantly surprised.

"That's my name don't wear it out," he joked, sliding off the ledge.

She took in his appearance, eyes travelling down to the bag at his feet before looking into his eyes, "You made it."

The statement, Harry felt, didn't really apply to the fact he'd found his way to her home and he gave her a grin. She dropped her cigarette on the floor and crunched it underfoot, turning to the door with her keys out.

"You got my letter then?" she asked as she swung the door open.

"Yeah, thanks," he said seriously, wondering if she was going to launch into a discussion about what she'd said.

"And the coke?" she asked, giving a slightly chuckle.

"Yeah, and the coke," he replied, feeling relieved.

"Well, don't darken my doorway all night," she joked, stepping into the flat, "come on in."



Harry followed her in, squinting through the gloom at his surroundings. Kitty's home seemed to be built along the same lines as a rabbit warren, tiny, dark corridors interconnected the four rooms, jam packed with various items, shoes, papers and magazines as well as a few bags of rubbish from the smell of it.

"Welcome to how the other half live," she joked, obviously poking fun at him, "care of Her Majesty's Government."

"It's nice," he said awkwardly.

She gave a snort of laughter and wandered on ahead.

"And you're a terrible liar," she said, causing him to grin slightly.

He stumbled along in the dark about to say something when he stepped on something that sounded suspiciously like broken glass. This didn't seem to worry Kitty however and they emerged into the kitchen and lounge, which was also cramped and cluttered.

"Bet you though I was joking when I said all self-respectin teenagers should live in a sty eh?" she asked him, wandering over to the fridge, "wanna drink? I've got coke or milk, unless you want something a little stronger?"

"Coke's good thanks," he said, standing awkwardly in the centre of the living room.

"Think fast," she said, throwing a can at him.

Quidditch gained reflexes kicked into action and he caught it on its path over his right shoulder.

"Nice one," she said, nodding appreciatively, "mind if I just fix myself a quick sandwich?"

"No, go ahead," said Harry, dropping onto the sofa.

"You want one?" she asked, her head lodged in the fridge.

"I'm ok thanks," he said, taking in his surroundings.

"Bag of crisps?" she tried again, shaking a bag of salt and vinegar walkers in his direction and he agreed, if only to stop her raiding the entire house for food for him.

"So, how was work?" he asked vaguely, staring for a few moments at the TV, whose aerial consisted of a coat hanger held together ingeniously with gaffa tape.

"Crap," she sighed heavily, giving a shrug, "full of leery old men who think my arse is public property..."

"Oh....right..."

Harry didn't quite know how to respond to that so he looked around the room feeling slightly embarrassed. There was only the small sofa he was sat on and a single seater that was position in front of the heater and TV. Next to it sat a table, every inch of its surface crammed with empty bottles; vodka, gin, whisky...He looked over to Kitty, who had her back to him as she buttered her bread.

He suddenly wondered where her father was, it was gone 1 now and there was no sign of him.

He became aware Kitty had been chatting away to him and he'd completely missed everything.

"Sorry – I was a million miles away, what did you say?"

"Not important," she laughed, wandering over with a plate and her can of coke, "just trying to fill space."

He got up, shooting another glance at the table, feeling its presence slightly ominous. He remembered the way Kitty's features had darkened the day before when she mentioned her father and wondered if there was more than met the eye.

"Best go to my room I guess," she said thoughtfully, looking around as if she'd seen the place for the first time, "it's rank in here."

She led him back through the maze and into her room, which was a lot smaller than his room at the Dursley's and again, just as messy as the rest of the house. There were clothes all over the floor and the table against the back wall was groaning under the weight of all the junk; CD's, videos, more clothes, pieces of paper, old dinner plates. The walls were absolutely covered in movie posters, hardly any of which he could recognise. It was clear though that this was not her room, most of her possessions were crammed into one corner, the rest of it taken up with stacked furniture.

Harry dropped his bag to the floor as she walked over to the small TV and popped a tape in, and began forwarding it with the zapper.

"This is my absolute favourite TV show," she said happily, flopping down onto the sofa that must have doubled for a bed as she had to throw a few pillows off.

"What is it?" he asked, sitting down beside her.

"Simpsons," she said, grinning widely as she pressed play and the familiar theme tune, even to Harry's ears, filled the room.

They watched the first few minutes in silence and Harry wondered whether the Dursley's had discovered him missing yet, they probably wouldn't till the next morning, possibly afternoon, and even then wouldn't say anything to the Order until at least the evening. That gave him plenty of time, unless the Order or his Aunt and Uncle got suspicious.

"So, you finally did it?" she asked him, shifting slightly so she could see him properly.

"Yeah," he said, grinning widely at the sudden realisation of the release of pressure he could feel.

"Were you followed?" Kitty asked, looking serious.

"I don't think so," he said, avoiding her eyes.

"Good," she said, turning back to the programme, "Oh I love this bit, listen, 'ok brain, I don't like you and you don't like me', classic line."

Harry laughed at her impersonation, it seemed a clever idea to him now, to put a tape on while talking about serious or personal things, that way if things got awkward there was something else to focus on. He watched a few more minutes of the programme before his mind started to wander once again. He was thinking once more about what would happen to him if he was caught, would the Order go ahead and actually put bars on his windows? Or would he be moved to Grimauld Place again?

He found that his gaze kept flicking up to the clock on her desk and after a while he was aware that Kitty was staring at him.

"Nervous?" she asked him, slight grin on her lips.

"No..." he replied instantly, before instantly feeling foolish.

He was about to explain himself better when something caught his eye. It was a cut on Kitty's face he hadn't noticed before, running along her hairline and surrounded by a yellowy-green bruise. It must have been hidden by her braids, which she'd just tied back. He couldn't help but stare at it, mind working overtime trying to imagine the ways it was possible to get a cut there.

"Hey, I know I'm drop dead gorgeous but there's no need to stare," she joked playfully and Harry realised she'd been aware of him watching her.

He remembered the table in the lounge over brimming with empty bottles of alcohol and the large bruise he'd seen in the Spy Snitch, suddenly finding their presence all the more ominous.

"What happened to your head?" he asked her seriously.

The smile on her face flickered momentarily and for the briefest moment Harry thought he saw fear in her eyes. But then as quickly as

it had come she was smiling again, feeling the cut gently with her fingers.

“Slipped on some wet tiles in the bathroom,” she said easily, before giving a laugh, “came around with a Kitty sized dent in the toilet.”

She was lying through her bare teeth and Harry could tell.

“Did you go to the doctors?” he asked her, testing her reactions.

“What, and tell him I’m a plank for not seeing wet tiles?” she asked him with a laugh, “I don’t think so!”

Why was she lying?

“You might be hurt,” he pointed out.

“I already know I’m hurt Harry, I don’t need a doctor to tell me that, I can see it can’t I?” she said, and he could see she looked uncomfortable.

“It might get infected, it looks pretty yellow,” he prompted.

“It’s fine Harry,” she muttered, turning back to the TV and pulling a few braids down over the wound, hiding it from his view.

He felt a horrible uncomfortable feeling in his stomach, one that told him he already knew where the injury had come from, he’d known almost from the moment he’d seen it. He continued to watch her resolutely trying to focus on the TV, wondering what he should say to her, if he should say something. He opened his mouth hesitantly hoping the words would magically appear to him.

“Kitty-” he began, casting about for inspiration.

“Drop it Harry,” she cut in harshly, throwing him a glare, “it doesn’t matter ok?”

“It doesn’t matter?” he asked her and from his tone she must have known that he knew.

"No, it fucking doesn't, ok?" she said, before pointing the remote control at the TV and jacking up the sound.

End of conversation, he thought, watching the cartoon, his mind still with her cut. If her father really had done it, then he didn't think he could leave her here knowing it. What he needed was more information, but it was something that she was quite obviously going to hate him for prying into.

"Is your dad home?" he asked her, watching carefully for her reaction.

"Step dad," she corrected automatically.

"Step dad?" he asked, eyebrow raised - she'd never said... "Well, is he home?"

"Chuh, does it look like it?" she snorted, focussing on turning the volume up on the TV even more, taking a lot longer than was necessary, "this bit's good."

He looked at the screens for a few seconds and laughed appreciatively in the right places, before turning to look at her again. She couldn't mistake the fact that he was waiting for an answer.

"He shouldn't be back till a lot, lot later," she said, her voice sounding cool and off-putting to further questioning, "probably not till tomorrow."

"Oh, is he at work?" Harry asked, pretending he hadn't heard her earlier tone.

"No," she replied bitterly, before motioning to the TV again.

Harry watched it, doing some quick thinking. When he turned back to Kitty she pretended to be engrossed in the programme for a short while until it became obvious he was staring.

"What?" she asked him, "He's at the pub ok?"

"Don't they close at 11?" he pressed.

"Not this pub," she said darkly, before muttering something under her breath.

"You don't get along with him?" Harry stated.

"Why don't you just come out and say you want to know what's going on?" she asked him impatiently, although he could tell she wasn't angry with him.

"Because I'm not sure that I do," he replied.

"Then maybe you should trust your instincts," she told him, fingers unconsciously rearranging the braids in front of her cut.

"Kitty," he began, trying to sound as approachable and friendly as he could muster, "I want to know."

She gave him the briefest of surprised looks, as if she couldn't understand what he was asking of her, or why, before she gave a half-hearted shrug.

"Well, I've only been here about six months, before that I'd seen him a total of twice after they split up on account of him being in prison," she said in a bored voice "and yes, I hate living here and yes, I hate him – The End."

"Prison?" he said incredulously, turning away from the TV now so he could face her properly, "What for-"

"Beating a guy half to death with a very large stick," she said, giving a humourless laugh, "and stealing all his money."

Harry couldn't think of what to say to that, but tried to kick his vocal chords into gear.

"Apparently it was a bet gone wrong," she said, watching the TV again, before muttering darkly, "the bastard."

"He doesn't sound like the kind of guy that I'd want to find me in his daughters bedroom," he said weakly, trying to inject some humour back into the conversation.

"Step daughter," she corrected automatically.

"Right," he nodded hastily, looking towards the door fearfully.

"Don't worry," she said, patting his knee lightly as if he were simple, "by the time he gets back, I'll be gone."

Harry stared at her.

"Gone?" he repeated slowly.

She jerked a thumb to the corner of her room, against which a backpack and coat was leaning, "I was hoping you'd come today, I half thought you'd be round last night to be honest."

He stared at her intently for a few moments.

"You're running away too?" he said incredulously.

"Running away is such a bad term," she said dismissively, "I'm not running away from the situation, I'm running towards a new one, as quickly as I can."

"You're running," he repeated again, feeling some of the pain lessen in his heart, "with me?"

"If you feel like company?" she asked, looking at him for the first time with a funny look in her eyes.

It took him a few moments to realise she was nervous, she was worried he'd say no!

"Of course I want company," he said, feeling almost excited now, "I was worried this would be the big goodbye, the last waltz!"



"Excellent," she breathed, looking thoroughly relieved, "we'll save that for another day?"

Harry grinned to himself, leaning back against the sofa and processing what she'd just said. He wouldn't have to say goodbye to her, he was taking with him the one thing that seemed to give him and joy in life at the moment. The thought of having to run away on his own now seemed an impossible, lonely task, now he had no regrets whatsoever.

"Is that why that day in the park, you knew so much of what I was thinking?" asked Harry suddenly, "when we were talking about running away, you seemed to know exactly what I was feeling, why I had to leave..."

"Personal experience," she shrugged, before turning to him fully now and disregarding the telly, "and besides, I've said it before, I can see it in your eyes. A famous guy once said 'your eyes are the window to your soul'. All you have to do is look, but sometimes that's the hardest thing for someone to do..."

"And that's all you had to do?" he asked, amazed, "just look into my eyes?"

"That and study your body language, what you do and don't say," she said, giving a small laugh, "you're quite easy to read..."

"That's not really a good thing is it?" he asked her with a smile.

"Not really," she said with a pitying look, "we'll have to work on that." It was another late night at Grimauld Place, yet activity was still buzzing around the place, as it often did there night and day. Tonks was sitting in the kitchen with several other Order members who were all pouring over various sheaves of notes, plans, maps, anything that would help them in their particular line of inquiry. Kingsley was working on a new containment charm for Azkaban with Bill, who had arrived back in the country from a short, and mysteriously low profile trip abroad. Charlie was trying to explain to Moody the possible benefits of employing dragons as watchmen over the prison while Molly sat in the corner, knitting away peacefully.

Tonks stirred her tea absentmindedly, stealing a glance across the table to where Remus was sitting, staring glumly at the newspaper with unseeing eyes. She hadn't spoken to him yet about his drunken confessions in Sirius's room the night before and was unsure how to broach the subject, all she knew was that something had to be done. Remus was just getting more and more depressed and she was worried he might do something.

"Right – well I'm off," barked Moody suddenly, standing up to wrap a heavy travel cloak around his shoulders, "work to do..."

"You always make it sound so ominous and mysterious Mad-Eye," said Charlie sweetly.

"That's because it is my lad," said Moody in a low voice, bending down and fixing him with a madly revolving eye.

"Righty-oh," replied Charlie weakly and Tonks tried to hide a smile.

"Bill, I want you to contact me immediately when you found out about Our Girl," he said in his most commanding voice.

"Will do," he said promptly, and Tonks wished he'd saluted.

"See you all tomorrow morning," he said, stepping towards the kitchen door, before turning around slowly, and even more ominously than before, "if not sooner."

And he was gone.

Everyone waited till the front door slammed shut before they rolled their eyes and made quiet, amused comments to each other. Everyone turned back to their own work and Tonks looked over to Remus again, he looked awful.

"When are you going to tell Dumbledore about Our Girl," she asked him in a would-be casual voice.

He looked startled for a second, before realising who spoke. He looked at her blankly for a few seconds, before a faint pink tinge coloured his cheeks – he was definitely embarrassed about the night before she decided.

“Well, he’s not back for the International Confederation of Wizards Moot until late tomorrow afternoon,” he said, addressing his cup of tea, “he should be over then.”

She couldn’t help but raise her eyebrows slightly in surprise – why wasn’t Remus just owling him?

“What do you think he’ll do about her?” she asked him.

“I really don’t know,” he admitted, “I should think he’d find as much out about her before he decides on the next course of action.”

“Well, if Moody gets his way she’ll be fed to the Dragons,” she said, before laughing.

It sounded slightly unnatural and loud in the quiet kitchen and everyone looked across to her, eyebrows raised.

“Dragons you say?” said Charlie, his ears pricking up.

“Thought that’d get your attention bro,” said Bill, rolling his eyes.

“Ha ha, very funny,” he smirked back, before looking across to Tonks, “I don’t see what the big deal is – so Harry’s got a girlfriend, it’s not the end of the world.”

“Yes well,” interrupted Mrs Weasley, appearing magically at the side of the table with a large plate of biscuits and a fresh pot of tea, “I don’t think she’s really the sort of girl Harry should be associating with.”

“Why?” demanded Tonks a little more argumentatively than she meant to.

“Well, for a start I’ve heard she’s got that awful hair!” she said, as Charlie rolled his eyes again and looked over to Tonks as if to say ‘you’ve done it now’.

Tonks thought about this for a moment, instantly sprouting braided, brown hair. Mrs Weasley didn’t notice but Remus did, giving her a wide eyed look.

“Dyed all manner of colours too,” she added scathingly.

Again she didn’t notice as Tonks sprouted multicoloured stripes. Bill caught on this time and was grinning at Tonks. Remus was smiling faintly.

“And piercings,” continued Mrs Weasley, busy pouring the tea away.

Bill and Charlie were trying desperately not to laugh as Tonks’s face was suddenly adorned with an eyebrow bar as well as a pierced nose and lip.

“And don’t get me started on the make-up,” Mrs Weasley exclaimed, “a girl her age! It’s a wonder her mother lets her out of the house like that!”

Heavy black eyeliner and eyeshadow, long thick black lashes and a quick coat of red lipstick later, Tonks thought she was doing remarkably well. Not least of all to keep a straight face as the rest of the room around her was cracking up – even Remus was chuckling quietly to himself.

“And those clothes,” she finished with a shudder, looking to the ceiling for strength, “either three sizes too big or tight enough to fit a five year old – honestly, these muggle tailors, they’ve no sense!”

Bill helped out with this one, casting a nifty little charm that transformed Tonks’s robes into baggy jeans and a hooded sweatshirt. Now even Kingsley was laughing and Tonks got up, walking over to Mrs Weasley and holding her hands out for the tray she’d been carrying.

“Can I take that for you?” she asked politely.

“Oh yes please dear, if you just-” she began, before catching sight of Tonks and giving a startled cry.

Everyone in the room burst into howls of laughter and Tonks couldn’t help but join in herself.

“Thankin Ya!” she said in her broadest Birmingham accent, taking the plate out of the startled woman’s hands.

“Ok, this is going to sound really strange,” began Harry, twisting around in the sofa to face Kitty, “but can I ask a favour.”

“What?” she asked suspiciously as Harry blushed slightly.

“Can you help me dye my hair?”

She began to laugh and Harry grinned and patiently waited for her to stop. When she finally did she gave him a wide grin and attempted to straighten her face.

“Why?” she said with forced solemnity.

“Because, someone might recognise me otherwise...and I feel like I change,” he gave a shrug, “and why are you laughing? You do it all the time.”

“Yeah I know,” she said, shaking her head, “just feeling antagonistic.”

“You’re always antagonistic,” he muttered and she sniggered to herself.

“And how,” she agreed, before climbing to her feet, “you got a colour?”

“Ok, I couldn’t decide between blonde – because nobody would recognise me with that, or brown?”

He waited for her opinion and she looked at the two boxes he'd pulled out of his bag, which she held up to his head and squinted at for a while.

"Y'know, I think blonde would be better," she mused finally, "bit poncey, but I think you can get away with it if you start walking with a manly swagger."

Harry cracked up at this, "Don't I swagger manly-like at the moment?"

She merely rolled her eyes and pulled him to his feet and leading him to the bathroom, which was just off the main corridor and in the same state as the rest of the flat. In fact it was worse in here because mould had spread from the tiles of the shower, most of which were lying on the floor. She merely kicked them out of her path as if they were nothing more than leaves of a pavement and started to unpack the various tubes and pots from the hair dye box into the sink.

"Ok, sit on the toilet and stick your head over the shower I reckon," she said, reaching up for the shower hose.

"I'm not sure if I can trust you," he said mockingly as he did as she said.

"What's that supposed to mean?" she asked, pointing the shower nozzle at him as if it were a weapon.

"Well, no offence, but look at your hair," he grinned, ducking as she sent a smack his way.

"Right, now you've asked for it," she said evilly, "before you might have got away with a slight speckling of green but now..."

She let the threat linger and he gave her a cheesy smile. She merely rolled her eyes and pushed his head over the shower, turning on the shower, which was freezing cold and beginning to wet his hair. Harry closed his eyes, wondering if she was purposely freezing his head because he semi-insulted her hair.

“Sorry about the water,” she said after a while, “if you want it warm you’ll have to go upstairs and stick a quid in.”

“It’s fine,” he said quickly, grimacing as some went down the back of his neck – she wasn’t being to careful whether he got wet or not.

After a few moments she turned it off and after running her fingers through his hair, squeezed out the rest of the water. She got up and chucked him a towel, before sitting on the floor in-between the washing basket and tile mound and emptied the box onto the floor. Completely bypassing the instructions she began to mix the three bottles together in silence and Harry towel dried his hair and watched her, seriously wondering whether she was going to mess it up.

“And here comes the science bit,” she muttered, squinting at the contents of the bottle for a second, “I always love this bit, I feel like a right whiz, you know, brewing myself up a potion.”

Harry paused in his towel drying for a moment as her words startled him, before slowly continuing trying to make believe that nothing out of the ordinary had been said.

“Wouldn’t it be cool though, if you could just flick a wand and your hair would be dyed?” she suggested with a laugh, “save me a tonne of money, and time!”

“Yeah...imagine that,” he said weakly, wondering what she was getting at.

“Or even just a little spell to make the remote control fly over to you, so you don’t have to get up to turn over the tv,” she continued, oblivious to his increasing discomfort.

“That’s just lazy,” he managed to croak out, a sudden horrible thought creeping over him that she knew.

Somehow she’d found out about him, all these questions, what was all that about? She obviously was magical, or how else could she possibly find out, and play such a cool game?

“Nah, that’s not laziness,” she was saying somewhere far off, “that’s forward planning. Come on Harry, don’t tell me you wouldn’t like to have secret magical powers?”

He stared at her in silence, torn between wanting to run away and confront her.

“I guess so,” he said carefully.

“Be just like in the movies eh?” she said with a smile, turning back to her potion.

And as soon as the feeling of suspicion had come over him, it had left again and he realised how ridiculous you’d have to be to believe Kitty knew something, was planning this...

“Yuk,” she said, scrunching up her nose and moving away from the bottle, “lovely peroxide smell up my nose...”

Harry smelt it too and frowned, “Is it supposed to smell like that?”

“Yeah, don’t worry, I’m not going to poison you,” she laugh, before moving her nose away from the bottle again, “it’s because your hairs black and you wanna go blonde, its too dark see? So basically this stuff strips all the colour out of your hair, bleaches it right out.”

Harry thought about the hair colour charm they’d learnt in transfiguration last year, one word and a wave of a wand and poof, blonde hair, or if he was a metamorphmagus like Tonks he could just think blonde hair and have it. But not in the muggle world, here everything took time, energy, money...it was exhausting.

When he zoned back into the real world he saw Kitty pulling a pair of rubber gloves on and she looked at the thoughtfully then grinned evilly at Harry.

“You worried now?” she wiggled her fingers at him and laughed to herself as he flinched away with a look of mock-horror on his face, “lets swap place.”



In a few moments Harry was sitting on the floor, back pressed up against the toilet where Kitty was sitting wielding the bottle of chemicals and a very determined expression. She shuffled closer, stretching her legs out either side of him and got to work.

The peroxide made his eyes water and his nose run but he found the whole process quite enjoyable. Kitty was on fine comic form keeping up a monologue for his benefit, describing things like her favourite film, best piece of music, all interspersed by little comments about how his hair was going. He laughed along to what she was saying, cutting in once in a while to crack his own joke or poke fun at one of her comments and before he realised it, he was having immense fun.

When she finished spreading the gloop, she got up and ran into the kitchen, coming back with a roll of cling film which she had to spend a good five minutes convincing Harry that it was part of the dying process.

So finally, 15 minutes after she started Harry was stood in the middle of the rotting bathroom, head covered in white foam and wrapped in shiny plastic. Kitty tried not to laugh, but failed miserably and Harry was torn between righteousness and giving into the contagious laughter.

"You look like such a gimp!" she spluttered, before bubbling over with laughter and he smirked, picking up the bottle of leftover peroxide.

He looked at it thoughtfully, hefting it in his hands and giving Kitty a meaningful look.

"Oh I'm scared," she said in mock-worry.

"Don't you think I'd do it?" he asked her in such a way that she narrowed her eyes at him.

"No, I don't think you will," she said finally with a laugh, satisfied that she'd read his soul properly.

“You don’t huh?” he asked, rolling it between his hands and giving her an evil look.

“Go on then,” she challenged him, hands on hips, “I dare you to Harry.”

“Ok then,” he said simply, darting suddenly towards her.

She gave a whoop of laughter and ducked out of his reach and he tried to grab hold of her arm. She gave a shriek of laughter, taunting him loudly.

“Come on Harry! Is that all you’ve got? Put a little bit of effort into it man! Come on – get me!”

And thus ensued a furious game of chase, which would have been comical to anyone to have stumbled into – one figure, head wrapped in gooey cling film, the other soaking wet, screeching with laughter as she tripped over the various stacks of clutter, as the both shouted various well-meaning insults at each other.

“Come on Harry, be naughty for a change!”

“I will if you stand still, oi, that’s not fair!”

“You should have ducked!”

“You shouldn’t be attacking me with random items of household furniture!”

“It was a shoe, for chrisakes Harry!”

“It had a heel, don’t throw that at - Ouch!”

“Ha, take that you scoundrel!”

“Oi, that’s my gloop!”

When he finally did manage to catch her he had to fight a furious battle to stop her twisting out of his grip and was just about to

squeeze a big dollop of the chemical onto her head when she stopped struggling.

"Twenty minutes has gone, if we don't wash it off now all you're hair'll drop out," she said solemnly.

"Really?" he asked worriedly, dropping her wrist and looking at his watch anxiously.

"Nope, ha!" she yelled triumphantly, managing to both wrestle the pot out of his hand and wriggle out of his grasp, "su-cker!"

"You are so sneaky," he said, shaking his head in disbelief.

"And proud!" she declared, "but we actually do have to wash this stuff off now, come on."

"And violent," he muttered, rubbing his forehead, "I just want you to know if I bruise I will have my revenge."

"I'll sleep with one eye open then from now on?" she suggested, before pointing to the shower, "now assume the position."

She snickered at her own joke and Harry made a big show of hanging his head over the shower tray, huffing and sighing continually until she was forced to kick him in the shins. Once again she started soaking the whole of his neck and back with the freezing water and Harry grimaced, eyes shut against the heavy chemical smell that had engulfed him. They had to stop every few minutes for him to get an air break, and he tried to concentrate on watching the coloured water drain away as Kitty donned the gloves and ran her fingers through his hair again. Then suddenly she stopped.

"Oh my god..." she said hollowly.

"What?" said Harry instantly.

"Oh Harry...your hair," she said in a horrified whisper, sitting back as he jumped up, water flying everywhere as he ran to the mirror.

Blinking through his sopping fringe he anxiously peered into the mirror, scared of what he would see. Oh no, he moaned to himself, his hair was...

"Blonde?" he said blankly, turning to look at Kitty.

One look was enough to send her off into a wild fit of laughter, in which the words 'your face' and 'priceless' featured heavily.

"You!" he said, unable to speak through sheer indignation, "You are so mean!"

"And you love it," she laughed, before impersonating herself, "oh Harry...your hair!"

Before she could carry on laughing at him he darted forward and grabbed the shower hose, which was still spurting away and pointed it right at her face. She gave a shriek and scrambled backwards as Harry followed her with the pray, laughing at her spluttering indignation and anger at being a target of the fun.

"Give that to me!" she yelled, reaching forwards and trying to fight the hose out of his hands.

It succeeded in getting them both excessively wet to the point where they were going to have to mop the floor dry and were shivering away. She finally got hold of it and shoved it down the back of his shirt, causing him to yelp out and twist around, however, this caused him to slip of the wet tiled floor and he went crashing to the floor. But as he grabbed the only thing within range to stop himself, he ended bringing Kitty down with him and they both landed in a soggy heap at the foot of the toilet with a squelch.

After a few moments of shocked silence they began to laugh until Harry had to hold his sides that felt like they were splitting. As they began to calm down he thought to himself that this was possibly the most fun he'd ever had in his whole life and he wanted that moment, where they were cold and wet and smelling of evil chemicals, to last forever.

“Who knew dying your hair could be so much fun?” she finally said with a snicker.

“Yeah,” he grinned, before plucking a strand of ash blonde hair off his forehead and studying it, “has it worked properly?”

“Yeah, seems like it,” she said, twisting around to look at his hair closely, “it doesn’t look real and your roots will stand out like anything after a while, but now it looks good.”

“Honestly?” he teased her.

“Honestly,” she agreed with a laugh, before running her fingers through it again, giving it a ruffle that flung water everywhere, “looks good.”

He grinned happily, “I really want to do yours now.”

“After that?” she asked, shaking her head, “no thanks. I’m quite happy with my brown.”

“And pink,” Harry added, plucking one of her braids out of the bunch, “and blue, and green, and what’s this? Red...I see, and-”

“I get the picture,” she laughed.

“I think you need a blonde one too,” he said in mock seriousness, “the others are just going to feel like a rainbow that couldn’t quite make it...”

“You’ve got enough blonde for both of us,” she laughed, before giving a helpless shrug, “but I suppose if you really want to, I can hardly stop you...”

“You give in too easily,” he said, picking up the bottle of peroxide and searching her head for his favourite braid.

“Pick one already,” she said after a while, rolling her eyes at him.

“It has to be the right one,” he said in a chiding voice.

“They’re all the same!”

“I’m going to do...this one,” he proclaimed triumphantly a minute later.

“And why, pray tell, that one?” she asked with a grin on her face.

“Because it’s my favourite.”

“You can’t have a favourite piece of hair,” she sighed, rolling her eyes at him as he pulled one of the gloves on.

“Yes you can,” he said simply, studying it closely before tipping on some of the dye.

“Ok, so what’s your favourite piece of hair?” she asked him, scrunching her nose up at the smell.

“My fringe,” he said simply, as he wrapped the hair in cling film.

“Because it covers your scar?” she asked him, tease in her voice, “I wouldn’t. You could brand yourself as a superhero – Electroboy!”

She twisted around and pushed his blonde fringe back and beginning to speak in a fake American-movie accent, “Da da da da daa, da da da da daa! It’s Electroboy – touched by a bolt of lightning as a child, he alone can rid the world of evil with his mighty magical powers!”

Harry batted her hand away suddenly and she fell silent, taken aback by the furious yet panicked look in his eyes. She looked at him in confusion, attempting to form the words to say apologise but he merely stood up and strode past her and out of the room.

She remained where she was for a long time, knelt on the cold, wet floor, wondering.

“Sorry,” she said, holding out the can of coke as some kind of peace offering.

He looked up to her with an unreadable expression on his face.

"I get a bit carried away sometimes," she said awkwardly, "I don't mean anything by it..."

"It's ok," he mumbled, gaze fixed back on the tv, which he was watching unseeingly, "I'm too hotheaded. I get a bit defensive over some stuff – sorry..."

She gave a nod, cataloguing this fact and trying to guess what he meant.

"Ok?" she said as he took the can of coke from her.

"Yeah, ok," he said, trying to give her a grin but not quite making it.

She gave a nod and sat down on the sofa silently, suddenly there was a whole new aspect to Harry she hadn't guessed at all, and she could see it in his eyes - it hurt.

It hurt him and it was something big...but from that little bit of information, she couldn't possibly guessed what it could be, and spent the next few minutes thinking.

Harry meanwhile, was worrying to himself - how had Kitty known that, how could she just pluck something like that out of the air? He was beginning to rethink everything, surely if she could guess something like that, it wouldn't be long before she could guess other things, start wondering...

"Can I ask you a question Harry?" she asked him a while later, slightly hesitantly.

He could tell she was trying to be serious again and felt his insides clench anxiously, "Sure."

"Why did you live with your Aunt and Uncle," she began, "what happened to your parents?"

Harry grimaced, even though he'd been expecting her to ask him that question since they'd first met, it didn't make it easier when she

actually had. She was watching him very carefully and he thought for a moment about using the car crash story, but somehow it didn't seem right. He tried to prepare a muggle version of the story as he stared unseeingly at the telly for a few moments.

"They were murdered," he said eventually, addressing the TV.

She gave a gasp, "Oh my God...I had no idea...I'm so sorry...what happened?"

Harry was silent for a few more moments before beginning his story, picking the stuffing out of the arm of the sofa absentmindedly as he spoke.

"They were in hiding, a witness protection programme," he said, feeling the familiar squeeze of his heart, "the guy that was after them found them, and, well you can guess the rest. I was only a baby at the time so I don't really remember anything about it except what people have told me."

She didn't say anything when he'd finished and he finally looked over to see she had a hand over her mouth, looking deeply shocked. A sudden image of blinding green light flashed through his mind and he tried to banish it.

"Did they catch the guy?" she asked him in a horrified whisper.

"No," he said heavily, "he's still about."

"You've seen him?" she stated, watching him with pity in her eyes.

"We've met," Harry shrugged, cursing himself for being so honest with her, he'd really dug a hole for himself now, "I'm not really his favourite person."

She however didn't question this straight away, instead she was looking at him with unfocussed eyes, as if she was working something out. Suddenly her eyes widened as if she'd been graced with a sudden burst of understanding.



"Is that why you're being followed?" she said, sitting up quickly and looking at him in alarm, "you're still in the scheme? That's why it was so hard for you to get out!"

Harry looked upon her statement as his saving grace - a way to explain all the oddities in one go. All he had to do was shrug slightly, he wasn't lying to her by answering, she had assumed everything herself.

She swore to herself and looked even more alarmed, "Are you sure they haven't followed you? They can't come in here, we definitely don't need the coppers coming in -"

"Don't worry, I wasn't followed," he cut in mid ramble, she looked only mildly placated.

"Shit," she cursed again, looking off into the distance, "the coppers, man...this is bad..."

"Don't worry," Harry repeated earnestly, "there's no way they'll find out I'm gone until at least tomorrow morning, we'll be long gone by then."

"Yeah, right," she said faintly, looking worried still, "we should definitely be gone by early morning then...witness protection, man..."

She got up and headed over to her bag, kneeling above it and sorting through the contents, obviously checking she had everything. She was spooked, Harry could tell that much, and he couldn't blame her. So much for keeping your magical and muggle world separate he chided himself, Kitty probably wouldn't act the same now she knew the truth, or at least as close as she would ever get to it.

He had the feeling now that maybe she was having second thoughts, it was one thing to run away with an old acquaintance, but it was another to run away with a danger, especially one connected to the police, which obviously worried her. The silence was quite obvious now and Harry decided to take charge. He climbed off the sofa and picked up his rucksack, deciding maybe it was finally time for the Last Waltz, he couldn't ask a complete stranger to give up her life like this.

"What are you doing?" she asked him suddenly, climbing to her feet too, "where are you going?"

"Listen Kitty, I really appreciate everything you've done for me, you've helped me more than I think you'll ever realise," he said awkwardly, shifting from foot to foot as she dropped her bag, "but I can't ask you to do this and you can't just drop everything because you bumped into me."

"Yes you can," she stated, looking slightly panicked now, "you can't just leave!"

"I've got to," he told her, feeling the painful squeeze of his heart once again, "you don't want to get mixed up in all of this...I can tell you're worried so, I'll just go ok?"

"No, please don't!" she pleaded desperately, standing in front of the door and blocking it with her arms wide, "you don't understand...I don't care about your past or anything alright? Or witness protection or the coppers or whoever you were before I met you!"

"Kitty," he began, moving towards the door now.

"No Harry! You've got no idea how long I've been waiting for somebody to come along who could help me, understand what I've been through. I can't stay here Harry, you remember what I said before, how they break your spirit - well he's doing that to me, and one day I won't be able to fight back anymore. I'll be stuck here and become another fucking government statistic!"

She pressed her hand against her chest as if she couldn't breathe and leant against the door. Harry blinked at her in astonishment, he'd never heard her speak for so long without cracking a joke, without one of her many lies scattered within what she said, with absolute honesty and emotion. He stepped towards her uncertainly, a deep need within him to take the pain out of her heart but not knowing how to do it.

"Please don't leave me here Harry," she whispered, staring at the floor.

He reached out and ran a hand down one side of her face slowly. She looked up towards him in surprise but didn't jump away or shout at him, which he considered to be a very good sign. He relaxed slightly and repeated the motion.

"Of course I won't," he promised in a low voice.

She seemed to sag with relief, closing her eyes peacefully and tilting her head into his hand. He felt the same as he had that day back at the Dursley's before Remus had walked in, the feeling of intense excitement and nerves mixed into one bundle in his stomach and decided to do what he heart and brain was screaming at him. He leant down towards her, catching her lips with a soft kiss, which she quickly returned. Whereas their first kiss was quite unsure and shy, this time it was different - maybe it was the serious mood they had been in, or the thought that they were soon to be released from their prisons, but now it was different.

The kiss became deeper and Harry dropped is hands to her waist, pulling her closer as she wrapped her arms around his neck loosely. He didn't know how long the kiss lasted but he became aware his head was beginning to spin and he broke away, breathing deeply. She leaned her forehead against his, small smile playing on her lips.

"What's a good guy like you doing with a bad girl like me?" she whispered and Harry got the feeling she was speaking for her own benefit rather than his.

"Who said I'm a good guy?" Harry asked her in a low voice, giving her the slightest kiss on the lips.

She gave a small laugh and Harry could feel the vibration of it all the way through his body.

"And who says you're a bad girl?" he said, raising his hand and brushing a fallen braid off the side of her face.

"What makes you think I'm not?" she asked, looking deep into his eyes.

Harry could tell that the answer was very important to her, even though she sounded like she was keeping up the banter.

"Because I can see right through you," he whispered.

She stared at him as if he'd just said the one thing she'd been waiting for her whole life for and didn't laugh or grin at it. Instead she searched his eyes, as if looking for the cruelty of a joke.

"And you're the best thing that's ever happened to me," he told her, knowing that he had never meant anything more in his whole life.

She seemed to be left breathless by his statement, but still leant forward quickly, catching his mouth with an intense kiss. He was taken aback by the amount of emotion that could be felt in the kiss, comparing it laughingly with his experiences with Cho - had he felt then what he felt now? He could definitely say no to that, with Kitty right at the moment, nothing existed but them - the world of broomsticks and Dragon's seemed as far as TV and mobile phones to him.

Tonks cursed Mrs Weasley silently, scrubbing at the plate in her hands, pretending it was the woman's face. That woman could not take a joke and why the hell was she doing this anyway? She wasn't her mother, she couldn't assign her chores! With a flick of her wand the plates began to wash themselves and she leaned her elbows against the sink as watched them, staring glumly at the soap suds. It didn't matter that she was a qualified Auror to these people, to them she was just a clumsy girl they had to take care of.

She twirled a few locks of braided hair around her finger thoughtfully; Mrs Weasley was so narrow minded! Just because this mystery girl didn't dress impeccably she had taken an instant dislike to her, decided straight away that she was no good, rough, common. For her information, dressing like this was quite fun, Tonks liked her hair like this, and make-up was nothing bad! She began to suck the tips of one her braids, deciding that tomorrow afternoon she'd visit the girl

again dressed like this, maybe chat to her a bit, befriend her, see what was really going on. Prove to everyone that she wasn't the siren they all thought she was.

"You haven't done that since fourth year," came a voice from next to her, "feeling stressed?"

She straightened up instantly, pulling the hair from out of her mouth and regarding Charlie steadily.

"Old habits die hard," she said awkwardly, turning back to the sink and beginning to wash the plates by hand, "and I'm surprised you remembered."

"It was me that told you to stop remember?" he reminded her, picking up the towel and beginning to dry the crockery.

"Yeah I remember," she replied, "I seem to recall you told me it'd make a ball of my own hair in my stomach and strangle me in the night."

He gave a happy chuckle, "Oh yeah that's right – you were petrified for weeks!"

"Yeah, that's was brilliant wasn't it?" she said sarcastically.

Charlie stopped laughing and Tonks glared at the soap bubbles again. Most of the time working in the Order with Charlie was ok, he was hardly ever around and when he was they were usually surrounded by other people. To tell the truth, Tonks found it very difficult being around Charlie, but so would anyone who had to spend any amount of time with a serial ex-boyfriend that caused the happiest and saddest times of your school life.

"So, what are you up to now you're not on Harry guard?" he asked her conversationally.

"Er – working in the ministry," she said slowly as if he were stupid, "it is my job."

“Oh yeah,” he said, nodding as if he’d just remembered the fact, “caught any baddies lately?”

“No, you seen any dragons lately?” she said, in another sarcastic tone.

“Still the funny one,” he laughed, unfazed by her coldness, “you still in that band?”

“No,” she replied, finishing the washing up and draining the water away.

“Didn’t work out?” he asked.

“Obviously,” she said, rolling her eyes.

“Hey, why are you being so sore all of a sudden?” he said suddenly, “I thought we were friends now?”

“Oh come on Charlie!” she laughed incredulously, “since when have we been friends?”

“Since we were fighting on the same side?” he said with a shrug and she turned to look at him thoughtfully.

“Yeah of course,” she said neutrally, and she could tell he was having trouble figuring out how she meant it.

“Listen, do you fancy going for a drink when we’re off shift?” he asked suddenly, “give us a chance to catch up?”

“I’m not interested in starting another relationship right now Charlie,” she said flatly, deciding to save him the hassle.

“All I said was a drink,” he said, looking slightly angry now, “I didn’t ask you to start another relationship – not that you’d mind though.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” she asked him indignantly, noticing the sour look on his face.

"I've seen the way you've been looking at Remus," he said nastily.

"You what!" she said even louder.

"You heard me," said Charlie with a shrug, noticing Tonks's flushed cheeks smugly.

"Jealous?" she asked harshly, greatly irritated by his stupid laughing face.

"No, why should I be?" he replied cockily, "Just thought you should know he's way too old for you."

"For your information I don't-" she began, wagging her finger under his nose.

"You all finished up here now?" asked Mrs Weasley, who had suddenly appeared in between the couple, handing Tonks a handful of cutlery, "Good, well you can put these in the dresser for me."

Tonks took them, still glaring at Charlie dead in the eye, who was staring back at her challengingly. She gave a frustrated sigh and marched over to the dresser, well aware she was right in front of Remus and that both Mrs Weasley and Charlie were staring at her for very different reasons.

"I'm just going to get some stuff from the kitchen I think," Kitty said, picking up her bag and heading to the door, "and maybe some money...be back in a sec."

Harry nodded and turned to his own bag, he was slightly worried about the items he'd packed being seen by Kitty, or anyone else for that matter - he didn't think he could explain Advanced Defence Against the Dark Arts Super Edition, the Eye Spy Snitch, his photo album or even his wand. He began to rearrange the stuff so that they were all at the bottom and his clothes hid everything from view when Kitty wandered back in suddenly.

He hastily flipped the cover of his bag back down and looked up quickly.

"Do you think it's worth taking a can opener?" she asked him thoughtfully, scrutinising at it in her hand.

"Er, no idea," he said with a shrug - he'd forgotten about the food aspect of things.

"Maybe it would come -," she began before she suddenly broke off.

She cocked her head to one side and turned slightly towards her door, as if listening something. Then Harry heard it, a key scraping into the lock.

"Shit!" she exclaimed, look of horror taking over her face, "shit shit shit!"

"Your dad?" asked Harry, jumped to his feet, also panicked.

"Oh god," she whispered, terror in her eyes as she walked towards Harry.

She pushed him in the chest over to the alcove by the door, "Please stay here, don't come out ok - he'll kill me if he sees you!"

"Ok," Harry nodded hastily as the front door opened and she tried to calm her breathing.

"Don't come out ok?" she begged again.

"I won't!" he promised earnestly.

"No matter what ok?" she continued, quite obviously terrified, "Even if were arguing or fighting ok? Don't come out?"

"Fighting?" he whispered suspiciously, "what kind of fighting?"

"Don't come out," she said again desperately ok, "don't - promise Harry!"

"Ok, ok," he said and she nodded quickly, taking a deep gulp.



"Cathy!" came a loud, deep voice from somewhere in the flat.

"C-Coming!" she shouted back, giving Harry a warning look before leaving the room.

Harry held his breath, still pressed up against the wall behind the door and he tried to listen at what was happening. He heard someone heavy stumbling through the darkened corridors and the crunch of the glass Harry had previously stepped in and Kitty moving into the living room.

"I thought you were staying at Stacey's tonight Ian?" she asked in a neutral voice.

He heard the man swear violently and Harry flinched, he didn't sound like the kind of person you wanted to get on the wrong side of at all. He heard the clinking of bottles and a few cupboards banging shut as well as the next door neighbours TV. He tried to focus on what was going on in the living room.

"Why d'you want to know anyway!" asked her dad and Harry could hear the slur of his words, "you should be at work!"

"I worked the double today, early night," she said steadily.

"Early night!" he repeated, as if to an audience, "so much for needin' money! I expect ya gonna want me t'pay for everthin' yeah!"

"No," Kitty said in a tense voice, "and you can talk, you haven't done a days work in over five years!"

Harry flinched, remembering what he went to prison for, maybe it wasn't best to get that guy angry...

"Shut up you -," he said something that made Harry flush with anger and he glared at the door.

"I'm going to bed," said Kitty in a cold voice that was shaking slightly.

"No y'not, get me a drink," came the harsh demand, "now."

There was silence and Harry strained to hear what was happening, his heart beating wildly thinking about her trapped in there with him. There was the sound of a glass being slammed down on a table.

"I'm not you're fucking waitress," he heard her mutter as the TV suddenly blared to life.

Harry couldn't hear what he said back, but they were beginning to argue, the TV was still on in Kitty's room as well as next door and all around him the noise of the tower block was drowning out what was happening in the lounge. However he could tell they were both angry, the raised voices were travelling down the corridor. He risked moving and opened the door a fraction, and looking through he could see the glow of the TV on the wall of the corridor.

"What's the bag for?" growled the deep voice of her father and Harry's heart hammered madly against his ribs - her stuff was still in the room.

"I was going to stay over at a friend's house," she said in a neutral voice.

There was the sound of over people moving and then Kitty gave a yelp.

"Give it back to me!" she said, panic in her voice and Harry held his breath.

"You're friend not got food?" he said, voice slurred slightly but rising in anger.

"No, she hasn't," said Kitty angrily, "give me it back!"

"Lotta clothes here forra night," he said and Harry blood ran cold - he already knew...

Kitty must have realised this too because she didn't reply. Harry could hear the bag being emptied onto the floor and Kitty's protests as things were being thrown about.

"You good for nothing -" he roared, "you think you can just run away again? Just like the last time eh? And the time before? Well not in this house! Your mom might have a soft bitch letting you-"

"Don't you talk about her like that!" she yelled furiously and Harry watched her corridor with wide, anxious eyes, "if she was here now she'd-"

"She'd what? She'd probably think you were just as much of a stupid bitch as I do!" he shouted furiously and Harry felt his hands beginning to shake, "and she's not here is she! The smartest thing she ever did in her sorry life was giving up with a worthless piece of shit like you!"

"Shut up!" shouted Kitty, fury and pain in her voice.

"Can't take hearing it, can you Catherine?" he said in a sneering, cold voice, "that you're the reason she's dead?"

"I am not," Kitty hissed back.

"Of course you are - do you think she'd have been depressed, been on pills if you weren't so goddamn worthless? All the trouble, all the schools, drink, drugs and no good friends? You think that didn't wear her down, why do you think she killed herself?"

Harry stared into the corridor, his hands were shaking terribly now and he could feel the fury pulsing through his entire body. It was only the memory of the promise and the realisation that him turning up would cause more trouble that stopped him from walking straight in there and smashing his head in.

"Because of YOU!" she screamed angrily and there was the sudden sound of smashed glass, "look at you! You're a fucking worthless piece of shit if I ever saw one! Getting me to do all your dirty work! All you do is drink and -"

She cut off mid sentence and there was the sound of movement Harry couldn't decipher in the noise, it sounded as it was made by a sudden movement - what had happened? As far as he could tell there was silence in the living room.

"You bastard," came her low voice suddenly, shaking with rage.

There was a sudden burst of noise and Harry opened the door fully to listen, if he was hurting her in there than so help him god, he wouldn't be held responsible for what he would do. He could hear the sounds of a scuffle and he was turning and looking for his wand when she let out a piercing scream. Harry whipped around lightening fast, before the sound of shattering glass filled the air, followed by the sound of something heavy hitting the floor.

As if in a dream he left the room and was running down the corridor, all he could feel was the fury and the pain - what if she wasn't ok, what had he done to her? He entered the room and surveyed the scene. The first thing he saw was the man - he was massive - standing over six foot with arms the size of tree trunks. He had his back turned to Harry, who could see the massive tattoo of a spider crawling up his neck, long legs stretching across his bald head. Harry looked to the source of the noise and could see Kitty lying on the floor, the wreckage of the glass table of bottles she had fallen through lying around her.

She had her eyes closed and wasn't moving.

"What the hell have you done to her?" demanded Harry in a low voice.

The man turned around and regarded him at first with shock then anger, Harry could see there was blood on his clenched fist.

"Who the fuck are you?" growled the man harshly, "get out of my house!"

"No," Harry spat, moving towards Kitty, before the man blocked his way.

"Move out of the way," Harry demanded, hearing his voice from a long way away.

The man drew himself to his full height and stared at him. Harry realised he should have been frightened of this guy, who could probably knock him out in one punch, but the fury that was coursing through his veins masked everything. Harry moved forwards anyway, intent on getting to Kitty when the guy threw an arm out, which collided with Harry chest, blocking his path again.

"Get off me!" yelled Harry, shrugging the arm away, "she could be hurt!"

"You're with her?" he demanded angrily and Harry could smell the spirits on his breath, "oh this is good! She's managed to con a fucking little rich kid into-"

There was a groan from behind the man and Harry pushed away from the man to get to her. However, he grabbed Harry by the elbow and threw him across the room, such was the strength he had in those arms. He stumbled against the sofa and looked over to the man, who was turning to Kitty.

"If you lay one more finger on her," Harry said harshly, "I'm going to ring the police."

Before he knew what was happening, the man was in front of Harry, fingers tightening around his throat as he was thrown up against the wall. Harry desperately tried to pull air into his lungs, fingers clawing at the man hands as he stared at Harry with complete lack of emotion. The sudden ludicrous thought came to mind as his lungs burnt uncontrollably, that Voldemort would be so annoyed when he found out that some tattooed ex-con had managed to do in one moment what he'd been trying to do for five years.

Just as luminous spots of light were bursting in front of his eyes the pressure was released and he collapsed into a pile on the floor, holding his throat as he coughed and choked. He looked up through streaming eyes to see Kitty backing away from her dad, who was yelling something at her as she dropped the snooker cue she had

been wielding like a bat. He tried to throw a punch at her but she ducked expertly, and side stepped him. However she stumbled slightly, tripping on a bundle of her clothes and he managed to reach forward and grab hold of her arm, other hand reaching for her throat as he had with Harry.

Harry tried to pull in air desperately and he crawled forward, kicking out a leg so it smashed into the back of the man's knee, causing him to buckle to the floor. As he climbed to his feet there was a sudden flurry of movement and confusion, all Harry could hear was her dad swearing, Kitty shouting and yelling at both of them and his own voice in a detached sort of way. The TV was still blaring out and the next door neighbours were banging on the walls telling them to keep it down, Harry almost laughed at the thought. He was still trying to breathe deeply through his bruised throat as he climbed to his feet, unaware that the man had done the same and was waiting for him.

"NOOOOO!" screamed Kitty, just before the fist connected with his stomach.

The force of the punch was like nothing Harry had ever experienced and he fell to his knees instantly.

"You bastard!" Kitty was still screaming and through the horrible pain Harry heard another thrown punch connect with something.

He saw Kitty drop to the floor like a stone and he dragged himself to his feet in time to see her stirring and trying to do the same. The man was in between them now, staring down at Harry with a murderous look in his eyes. Harry drew himself up as much as he could and tried to throw his own punch, but the man dodged and threw his own which connected with Harry's jaw. The pain shot through the whole side of his face and Harry could do nothing but yell out as he fell against the wall, determined to keep on his feet this time. Through the noise and confusion a sudden sound shot through, ringing clearly and ominously.

The swish of a switchblade.

Harry looked up with real fear in his heart this time to see her father reaching towards him with one hand, the other grasping a long, vicious looking blade. Time slowed down and Harry could see the future unwinding before his eyes, he'd be stabbed, Kitty would be too...he'd die here in this grotty hellhole and no one would know for days...

Then there came a second noise, one that rang even louder than all others and commanded silence.

Click

The man whipped around and Harry also turned to stare at the source of the noise. It came from Kitty who was now back on her feet, hands shaking uncontrollably as they held onto something she was pointing at her father. Harry tried to focus his eyes, hoping against hope she wasn't holding what he thought she was.

"Don't you dare touch him," she choked out, trying to keep a steady voice even though tears were pouring down her face, "or I'll s-shoot you!"

Her father did make a sound, merely stood, arms raised slightly now. There was absolute silence in the room as all eyes were turned to Kitty who still hadn't made another move. Harry stared at her fearfully, taking in her wild appearance; there was blood all over her face and an ugly yellow bruise was already rising underneath both her eyes as her nose poured with blood freely. Far from trying not to cry, she had the strangest look of calm on her face as she pointed the gun at her fathers head, hands shaking so much her aim was weaving within a foot of her target, taking in Harry's head behind the man at times.

"Move away from him!" she commanded, her voice beginning to crack and border on hysterical.

The man began to shuffle sideways, stumbling over the wreckage of the lounge, eyeing the barrel of the small gun with wide eyes.

"Who's scared now huh?" she asked him, voice breaking suddenly, "who's scared of what's going to happen? Who's worried of things that go bump in the night?"

She kicked aside the wreckage of the table and stumbled forwards, glass crunching underfoot.

"Kitty," Harry tried in a would-be calming voice if his wasn't shaking too, "please don't do this..."

"No Harry!" she cried, eyes still fixed on her fathers, "you don't understand what I've had to put up with these past six months! Terrified every time the front door went, every time my door handle turned to my room at night! Scared every time that this time the bruise wouldn't be somewhere someone would see! Well not anymore - it's my turn now! This time, you can pray for your life, beg to be saved!"

There was a ringing silence and Harry felt his heart hammering madly, would she do it? She couldn't do it, he knew she couldn't, but she had been pushed so far...Harry watched her trembling form, wondering what was going on inside her head.

However, the time would never come that Kitty would be pushed to a choice as her father made a sudden, darting movement and knocked the gun to the floor, where it skittered towards Harry, stopping a metre away from him. Her father reached forward and grabbed Kitty by the throat who screamed in fury as she both went careering to the floor. Harry glanced down to the gun as her father straddled over her, both hands squeezing at her throat as she choked - there was only seconds.

He could see the life being squeezed out of her as she kicked her legs against him as Harry decided desperate times called for desperate measures. He reached towards the gun, but did not pick it up, instead he picked up the full bottle of vodka that was lying next to it by the side of the couch. Hefting it up he swung it round as hard as he could until it hit the man on the side of the head. It shattered in a rain of glass and liquid and her father was knocked sideways by the



force of the blow and slumped down instantly, like a puppet whose strings had just been cut.

And he didn't move again.

Kitty was trapped underneath and began shouting to Harry who darted forward and pulled her out. They stumbled backwards away from his still body, falling into a heap, breathing deeply as both their hearts beat uncontrollably. For a few moments they just sat there shaking, unable to do anything else, completely shell shocked by what had just happened. Kitty made a noise and raised a shaking hand to her mouth and Harry looked across to her before looking all around the room. Everything had gone silent, even next door had stopped complaining.

"Is he..." she began, looking from Harry to her father.

Harry swallowed deeply and crawled over to her father, placing a shaking finger on his neck. For a few seconds he could feel nothing and the icy dread and terror began to creep up on him, but then he felt it. A steady beat pulsing away under his fingers.

"He's fine," Harry said blankly, unable to process the emotion, "just knocked out..."

Kitty merely nodded, he couldn't know or understand how she might be feeling now.

"We have to get out of here," said Harry suddenly, his voice sounding gravely through his bruised throat, "now...come on Kitty, get your stuff."

She nodded mutely and began collecting things up from the floor, stumbling around as the blood streamed down her face as she stared at her father. Harry ran into her room and picked up his bag, throwing it over his shoulders and pulling her jacket off the bed, running back into the living room to find Kitty looking ready to go, hood pulled up over her face from her jacket. She was pulling a wad of money out of a chocolate tin that was under the couch.

"Let's get out before he wakes up," Harry commanded, taking hold of her hand quickly and walked briskly out of the room.

They hurried down the corridor, bursting out into the main corridor of the building, which was empty and quiet. They ran down the corridor, taking the stairs two at a time until they reached the ground floor and went out onto the street. They began to run in one random direction, desperate to get away from the horror of the night and didn't stop until they could breathe no more.

They were walking down some dark street full of boarded up shops and tatty cars before they spoke to each other. Harry had stopped walking and she had too, turning to look at him with swollen eyes. He dropped her hand and placed his on either side of her face, tilting it from one side to the other in the light, taking in the bruises and mass of tiny cuts from the flying glass.

"You went through the table," he said, his voice was still very rough from the sore throat.

"You've hurt your jaw," she replied, lifting her own hand and feeling the tender swollen part of his cheek.

He ran a thumb across one particularly free flowing cut, marvelling at the brave face she had plastered onto her own, "Are you hurt anywhere else?"

"My nose," she shrugged, then winced, "oh, and my back..."

Harry nodded, they'd have to find somewhere to get cleaned up and perhaps a place to sleep. Tomorrow morning he'd go to Diagon Alley and get his tracker taken off, then they would travel to find the letter writer, and the truth about Sirius. He took her hand silently again and they began to walk down the street, avoiding the path of other people, mostly those who had been out clubbing and were staggering their way home. As they turned onto a busier street, he felt his forehead give a stab of pain and it was with a sinking heart that he contemplated what must be happening back in the magical world to get Voldemort so happy.

"Here, let's get cleaned up," said Kitty, breaking him out of his reverie, pointing to a brightly lit take-away.

They walked in and headed for the toilets and while the staff weren't looking, Harry slipped into the ladies with Kitty.

"Sit up here," he said, patting the surface next to the sinks before walking over to the toilet stall and pulling out a huge handful of toilet paper.

He ran it under the tap and stood in front of Kitty, noticing the way she was avoiding his eyes as he pressed the paper against the cut above her eyebrow. She flinched slightly and he tried to be more gentle, wishing he could whip out his wand and perform a quick healing charm - two seconds and they could be as good as new. He tried to wipe most of the blood from the tiny cuts away and she closed her eyes peacefully. Harry thought about everything he'd overheard, wondering if her mother really had killed herself and why, Kitty had obviously been told it was her and he wondered if she believed that...

"What will he do when he wakes up?" he asked her suddenly, thinking anxiously about the police.

"Probably go to the pub," she said angrily, "there's no way he'd ever ring the police, there's too much stuff in the house he could get in trouble about."

"Like guns?" Harry said offhandedly and her body tensed, though her eyes remained shut.

"Yeah," was all she said, "among other things."

He rinsed another piece of tissue under the tap and pressed it to her cheek, which was red raw and burning hot under his fingers.

"Would you have done it?" he asked her in the same way she would have, upfront and unashamed.

She gave this a few seconds thought before finally answering, "Maybe...Probably."

He didn't say anything, trying to figure out how he felt about that.

"Do you think I'm a bad person now?" she asked, opening her eyes and fixing him with an interested, if not challenging, look.

He decided he didn't really care that she could have shot him, and found himself surprised at that. A few days ago would that answer have been the same?

"I considered it," he said, following the tissue with his eyes instead of meeting her intense stare, "I'm not going to think you're a bad person for trying to stop someone trying to kill you."

"He wouldn't have killed me," she said, features darkening slightly.

"It didn't look like that to me," said Harry shortly, "or feel like that - he tried to strangle you."

"He's tried that before!" she snapped suddenly, batting his hand away now and staring at the floor mutinously, "it's nothing new."

Harry nodded cautiously and threw the tissues into the bin, regarding her face finally. Most of the cuts were too small to see now, but the eyes were a bit of a give away, ringed in massive purple bruises that seemed to have arisen due to her injured nose and framed with larger cuts that were still obvious. He felt slightly wrong-footed, she was angry at him now.

"Swap places," she said suddenly, sliding back to the floor and waiting for him expectantly to sit on the side.

He climbed up heavily and watched as she went about his routine, before turning to him. He waited to see how she'd act next.

"Sorry, it's no good, you'll have to stand up - you're too high for me up there," she was trying to inject some humour back into her voice but had failed miserably.

Harry felt slightly relieved and slid back off the side and leant against the wall as she began to dab at his lip, which after a trial feel with his tongue realised was split and swollen. He frowned slightly before flinching as she examined his jaw with light fingers, it felt painfully tender to the touch and ached constantly. He began to watch Kitty instead, trying to ignore the pain as he studied her every move, committed every detail of her once beautiful face to memory, watched the eyes follow her fingers. He finally understood what she had said to him back in the park, that she only had to look into his eyes to know he was unhappy, that he wanted out. Now when he looked into her eyes he could see the pain she tried to keep hidden, the hope she carried around for a better future, the broken spirit - how could he not have seen it before?

As if sensing his thoughts she paused and looked up at him.

"You're staring," she stated.

He looked away but didn't say anything. He wondered what her story was, there was so much he didn't know about her he wondered how he could feel so intensely linked to her. Their total time spent together spanned about three hours before that evening but here they were, on the run together. He gave a half smile, wondering if she'd realised their odd situation as well.

"What's that grin for?" she asked him, smiling as well now.

"Just thinking," he said, tucking one of her braids behind her ear, "I don't even know your favourite colour."

She gave a small, incredulous laugh, "That's the one thing you want to ask me above all else?"

"For starters," he shrugged, moving closer to her slowly.

"Well, right about now it feels like green," she said in a low voice as Harry leaned down towards her.

He caught her mouth with a tender kiss, intent in pushing the horrors of the night out of his head when he was painfully reminded of it. His

lip stung terribly and pulled back slightly, feeling it with his upper lip, thinking it had split again. Kitty regarded him with a saddened look in her eyes and ran her hand softly down the side of his face.

"It'll be gone in a few days," she said with a brave smile on her face.

A few days, Harry thought to himself laughingly - a few seconds in Madam Pomfrey's care and they'd look like new, why did everything in the muggle world take so long?

"I could kiss it better for you?" she suggested, eyes alight with mischief now.

Harry smiled as she leant forward and place a light kiss on the corner of his mouth before pulling back, looking proud of herself, "Better?"

"Much," he laughed, "but I've got one here too..."

She ginned and leant forward and kissed the side of his jaw.

"And here," he said, trying to keep a straight face.

"You're such a baby," she said, leaning forward and kissing the other side of his jaw.

"Am not," he said, pouting comically, "Would you like me to kiss you better?"

"It might take you a while," she laughed, "I'm covered in cuts."

"Well, it's about," he checked his watch quickly, "five hours till sunrise, best get started!"

She gave a delighted laugh, giggling as he leant forward, "I can't believe you just said that."

## Chapter Seven

When my fist clenches, crack it open,  
Before I use it and lose my cool,  
When I smile, tell me some bad news,  
Before I laugh and act like a fool.

Harry awoke early, the sound of the birds ringing in the new morning pulling him from his already light, uneasy sleep. As he pulled his eyes open he was greeted by the sight of a rolling grassy bank, a small duck pond and several early morning joggers. The park had been Kitty's idea, they had walked the streets for hours, trying to find anywhere to sleep before they'd given up. The alleyways were too dangerous and the park really wasn't that much better, but they'd found a secluded area, hidden by trees and had survived the night unscathed.

Harry realised he was shivering and tried to pull his jacket around him tighter, shifting his numb limbs into action. He looked down to Kitty to see her curled up under her own jacket, deeply asleep. He stood up and stretched, looking into the park – the joggers were skirting far away from them and in the distance Harry could see the city rising up above the trees.

He sat back down against the tree, pulling his bag towards him. He wondered if the Order had found him missing yet and for the thousandth time what would happen when they did. Could they track him instantly, would Remus and Dumbledore be in charge of it? If it was Harry had no chance, Dumbledore would know where Harry was going before he himself knew, his only chance was getting his tracker taken off before that happened. He pulled his backpack towards him and pushed through the clothes and stuff at the top to get to the things he'd never want Kitty to see.

He pulled the letter out, noticing how careworn it was now, almost torn at the creases. He reread the man's words, finding them still giving him the sense of hope, that greatest of all gifts that he needed to cling onto. If he ever was to go back to the magical world, which he doubted but worried about, he'd need to know.

Tonks sat up with a start, suddenly awake for no reason that she could decipher. She gazed around the room blearily, before peeling off a piece of paper that was stuck to the side of her face; she looked at it dimly before absentmindedly dropping it on the floor. She was sitting at her desk at home, which was covered in clutter, half eaten sandwiches, moulding cups of tea and the reports she should have read the night before. However, a late night raid on a merchants house had tired her out and instead of using the desk as a place to study, she'd used it as a pillow.

She looked at the clock above the fireplace, nearly jumping out of her skin when she saw the time. She had to be on Harry duty in an hour and she desperately needed to see Gringotts about her bank account, which had been shut down for no possible reason.

Except maybe the lack of funds within it, a nasty part of her brain told herself.

She practically threw herself out of her chair, congratulating herself on falling asleep in her robes, meaning she wouldn't need to waste time getting changed and magicked herself a cup of tea. After Harry duty she had a seven hour shift in the Ministry before she could come home and catch up on her missed work, meals and sleep. Typical that sleep should come at the bottom of the list she thought grimly, giving herself long brown hair for the day and pulling it into a ponytail.

She checked the time again and created a plate of toast, placing it on her desk and picking up one of the reports – maybe she had time to get the general gist before...

"Tonks?" came a voice from over her shoulder and she gave a start, spinning around brandishing her wand and a sheaf of parchment.

However she saw the clearly bemused face of Remus Lupin looking out from her fireplace.

"Wotcher Remus," she said blankly, not sure why she was so surprised to see him.



“Good morning...” he said cheerfully before nodding to the report she was still pointing at him, “What were you going to do with that?”

“Bore you to death,” she muttered under her breath before giving him her best wide-eyed, I’ve-been-awake-for-ages smile.

He gave a chuckle which caused her to grin even more, this time for an entirely different reason and she self-consciously checked her appearance. The out-of-bed look wasn’t that becoming on her and she was regretting her severe, plain hairdo for the day.

“Just wondering if you’ve got time to do a little favour for me?” he asked, reverting back to his serious face.

“Sure, anything,” she said at once, before cursing herself and trying to appear more demure.

“I need you to help Bill get access to the Muggle Department and the Ministry library,” he said, apparently not noticing her odd behaviour, “We can get him signed in good enough, but we need higher clearance for the other places.”

“Of course,” she said as she picked up her bag and began to put her files into it, “it’ll have to be tomorrow now, I’ll have to get some forms processed. So, why does he need the library?”

“He’s doing a bit of research into Our Girl – you know, name, where she lives, heritage that kind of thing...” he said, and Tonks could see the worry in his eyes, “Moody’s idea...it’s good to know at least.”

“Yeah I guess,” she said, dropping into her chair and looking at Remus thoughtfully, “we could just ask Harry...”

“He wouldn’t tell me,” said Remus, looking away, slightly ashamed, “anyway, at least this way he doesn’t think I’m interfering.”

“He wouldn’t think that Remus,” she said reassuringly, “he’s just...a bit messed up now I think. Space and time, the true greatest healers...”

"Of course," said Remus, quite obviously not taking on board anything she said, "I better go, I've got a meeting with Dumbledore. Are you on duty next?"

"Yeah," she said, heart giving a horrible lurch when she realised how little time she had to sweep by Diagon Alley and get to Little Whinging.

"Well, I'll see you tonight then?" he said, making to leave.

"Tonight?" she said at once, sounding panicked, "what's happening tonight?"

"Order meeting?" he reminded her, "at HQ? Didn't you hear about it?"

"No, of course I did," she said nonchalantly, trying to remember desperately if she had or not, "I thought you meant something else..."

"Ok," said Remus, looking at her oddly for a few moments, before flicking his eyes across her flat, taking in the mess, "see you later then Tonks, Goodbye."

"Yeah, bye Remus," she said as his head disappeared.

She shoved her fist in her mouth and made a low whining noise, rocking backwards and forwards before straightening up, feeling much better. In a second she had her cloak firmly clasped over her shoulders, her bag slung around her neck and was wearing a slightly panicked expression.

"Diagon Alley Station," she told the fire, disappearing into the now, merrily crackling green flames.

Her forgotten toast lay on the table where she left it slowly growing cold and collecting dust, in good company with the other half eaten and untouched meals.

Kitty prised her eyes open slowly, aware first of all of the cold, which had caused her hands to curl into fists that couldn't now be opened by force of will alone, then of the ache. Her whole back felt like it was on fire, and every slight twist or movement sent twinges to her brain that shouted for all movement to stop, for nobody to move so that no

one would be hurt. The familiar feeling of bruised eyes was recognised next and she felt them gently, even blinking seemed to hurt.

Her brain backtracked across the night before, remembering the shift of horror at the pub, then meeting Harry on her doorstep, watching the Simpsons then...She groaned slightly, remembering her father coming home, remembering their argument, Harry, the gun, the takeaway. She squeezed her eyes tightly shut, the adrenaline that had served her the night before was gone and now all she felt was cold, hurt and scared. Although she wouldn't admit to any of these things.

She rolled onto her back, which screamed in protest, looking first up at the canopy of the tree she was under, then across to Harry who was awake, sitting with his back against the trunk. He was putting a leather bound book into his bag and she gave a bleary smile.

"What time s'it?" she croaked, throat still full of sleep.

"Eight," he said, rubbing his eyes and blinking quickly as if he'd been busy reading for a long period of time.

"Eugh," was all she said, rolling over fully so her face was squashed into the grass, "too early."

He gave a chuckle and she heard him doing his bag up and making general noises of movement forthcoming.

"We're not getting up now are we?" she asked, voice muffled by the mouthful of grass, "it's practically the middle of the night."

"Well, I really need to go and pick something up from London," he said, "do you want me to come back and get you when I've finished?"

"No," she said quickly, also making a move to get up now, "I'm up, I'm up..."

She sat up, rubbing her back tenderly and trying to focus her eyes into the new day, Harry was watching her bemusedly and she

attempted to pile her braids away from her face by means of tying them all together in knots.

“Not a morning person,” she said, giving a huge yawn and looking around for her own bag.

“I guessed,” he said, leaning forward and pulling some grass from her hair.

“Did you say London?” she asked suddenly, looking across to him and squinting slightly.

“Yeah,” he nodded, squirming slightly which aroused her suspicions more.

“What for?” she asked, studying his eyes intently.

“I need to pick some money up I’m owed,” he said instantly and she recognised it as a much practised lie.

She continued to study him, trying to figure out what he really wanted in London and why he didn’t want to tell her, before shrugging and pulling a woolly cap from her bag. Harry seemed quite relieved and climbed to his feet, offering her a hand and pulling her up.

“Trains the best bet then,” she said, stretching painfully, “I’ve got some cash on me.”

“Yeah, so have I,” he said as they began to walk down the path.

“You’re not a morning person are you?” she asked him a while later, making it sound as if she’d just wondered if he had a third eye.

He shrugged apologetically.

“Je-sus,” she sighed sadly, causing Harry to chuckle even more, “I’m going to have to teach you the importance of being idle.”

“Please, I’m going to be paid next week,” pleaded Tonks to the impassive face of the Goblin in front of her.

“That doesn’t matter. That’s next week, this is now,” he said, pulling a red rubber stamp from the draw and hovering it over her reapplication form.

“Please,” she said desperately, “I know I owe you a little bit already but-”

“Miss Tonks,” said the Goblin sternly, stamp still hovering ominously, “you currently owe the Bank of Gringotts and Associates 346 galleons, 7 sickles and 3 knuts in overdraft, 57 galleons, 2 sickles and 3 knuts in banker’s fees-”

“Yes, I know that,” she said worriedly, “but I’m being paid in less than a week’s time! I can pay some of it off, I promise! And I’m sure the banker’s fees can’t be that much...”

“Miss Tonks,” he repeated, glaring at her accusation, “I can assure you that is the correct figure, let me read out your statement, 1st May, muggle transfer by direct debit of 40 galleons to Mr. T. Tonks, bankers fee 3 galleons, 1st June, muggle transfer by direct debit of 40 galleons to Mr. T. Tonks, bankers fee, 3 galleons. 1st July, muggle transfer-”

“I get the picture,” she muttered, slumping in her chair as she watched the goblin smiling at her nastily.

“Yes, I believe you have,” he said happily, “now I have two years worth of direct debit and bankers fees here which you have never attempted to pay. So we ask for prompt payment now.”

“But how can I pay you if I haven’t got a bank account!” she declared, throwing her hands up at the injustice of the world.

“Well Miss Tonks, there are several ways – firstly, we can give you contact details of several of our associate loans companies, secondly, we can repossess property amounting to your debt and associated fees, and thirdly, you can work for us.”

He sniggered evilly at his own joke and Tonks covered her face with her hands, unable to think of what to do next.

“Reapplication for Vault 1975 denied,” he said gleefully, smacking the parchment a little harder than necessary with the stamp, “Associated fees and overdrafts to be paid off within two days. Repossession and reclamation to take place on the third day, if the agreement has not been met.”

Tonks could only splutter in protest and indignation as the Goblin rang the bell, and a bigger, even nastier looking goblin was called for. He took her by the elbow and led her forcefully to the mighty bronze doors of the building. He pushed her out and she turned around angrily.

“Yeah well!” she shouted at his retreating back, “I hope you catch a nasty case of Glabella Rot and your stupid pointy nose falls off!”

Several people turned and looked at her and the goblin threw the reapplication form at her feet for the entire world to see. She bent over and scooped it up, staring for a few moments at the huge red REJECTED stamp as she tried to process what this meant, before screwing it up. She slumped onto the marble steps and spent a few minutes with her head cradled in her arms – what was she going to do now? She had no money and the goblins were on her back – everyone knew how obsessed with money goblins were. They’d follow her for the rest of her life, if she died they’d follow her family, and their family until thousand of years later the debt would have to be paid.

With interest.

Harry and Kitty waked down the busy London street in silence, in his case it was through nerves, he was about to go into Diagon Alley, right into the lions den. It would be the last time he’d ever step foot inside the magical world and there was a high chance that someone would recognise him. Kitty however was being silent for an entirely different reason, she was busy planning ahead, trying to remember old friends, addresses, numbers, old favours she could recall. They’d need somewhere to stay until she could figure out how to run this, until they could get jobs and everything.

Just as she was musing about the idea of getting fake ID when Harry suddenly stopped walking and it took her a few moments to realise. She backtracked slightly to see him grinning at her in an uneasy way that told her he was probably nervous, up to something and trying to hide it.

“My mates house is just down the road,” he said when she looked at him, eyebrows raised and waiting for an explanation.

“Ok, so I take it that’s code for, get lost for half an hour right?” she asked him bluntly, noticing the blush creeping up his cheeks.

He gave an awkward shrug and she merely rolled her eyes, “Its fine, I’ll go and-”

“- see a man about a dog?” he finished.

“Yeah, that’ll do,” she said, “meet you at that coffee shop at...”

“Half eleven?” he suggested.

She merely nodded and wandered off before he could say anything else. She didn’t particularly care if he thought she was being rude or was annoyed at this, served him right for not wanting her to come with him. She waited a long moment before she discreetly looked over her shoulder and saw him crossing the road.

She walked over to the nearest shop, a small bakery, and leant against the wall, watching Harry closely. He completely bypassed the street he said he was going down and began to walk down the opposite street. He paused next to a bookshop and looked around himself suspiciously and she ducked out of sight just in time for him to look over to where she was.

He walked towards the shop and she frowned as she lost sight of him momentarily in a gaggle of school kids that walked past. However he didn’t emerge on the other side and she squinted closer, she had definitely seen him walking towards the wall, and then he’d just disappeared.

That was odd, she thought, frowning in annoyance and turned away, deciding to have a little look around before she went to their meeting place. Harry, she decided finally, was a very mysterious character and was definitely up to more than he let on. A guy with secrets she mused to herself as she window shopped in HMV, the most dangerous sort.

Harry climbed to marble steps of Gringotts feeling a certain amount of nervousness and trepidation. This fear was intensified when he saw a young woman slumped on the steps, crying into her arms, piece of parchment clasped in her hands as if it were her death warrant.

He gave a gulp and carried on climbing, expecting any moment for someone to shout his name, for the Order to swoop in, for someone to notice him. But the cloak and the hat seemed to be working. The lack of glasses and the new brown eyes and blonde hair seemed to be doing the trick – he was glad he had a forgettable face. Once his scar was hidden, he really was just another person in the crowd. He went across to the desk and presented his key to the goblin.

“Follow me Mr. Potter,” came a voice from his knees and Harry grimaced, before looking around wildly.

No one seemed to have noticed or care and the goblin looked supremely uninterested in the celebrity he was escorting down the bowels of the bank. Once at his door, the Goblin let him in and Harry was once again struck dumb at the sight of all the gold, the great rolling hills of it that made it look like a golden landscape. Once again it occurred to him that he had no idea how his parents got all this money, they must have had good jobs, or rich families...

After the initial shock wore off he noticed a small chest off to one side he'd never seen before.

“What's that,” he asked the Goblin curiously.

The Goblin gave him a withering look as if to say ‘Don't you even know?’ and handed him a piece of parchment that was in a frame on the door. It was a list of transfers in and out of his bank account and he studied the dates, that familiar feeling of sorrow squeezing at his heart when saw the dates going back before his birth, transferring



money into bank accounts of people Harry didn't recognise, shops, muggle accounts. A whole history immortalised on one piece of parchment.

"It's a page from your log book," said the Goblin, feeling slightly charitable and pointing to a heavy leather book that stood by the door on a pedestal.

Harry had never seen either before and searched his memory for a clue, but figured it wasn't really important.

"The chest is a transfer from vault 711 to your own," read out the Goblin, snatching back to parchment and hanging it reverentially back on the door.

"Vault 711?" asked Harry, feeling his throat tightening.

"Yes, the Black family vault," said the Goblin, sounded disinterested, "you see this symbol next the transfer date? That means this was an instant direct debit transfer, they usually take place on special occasions – coming of age grants or inheritance mainly. In this case I believe it was the product of a will, dated the..."

But Harry didn't hear the rest; he was too busy staring at the chest, thoughts a million miles away. He was back in the Department of Mysteries; he could see the veil, hear it talking to him, whispering in Sirius's voice. Inheritance, his mind whispered to him, Sirius is dead so you get a nice pile of cash. What a lovely replacement...

"Could you tell me how much is in there?" asked Harry in a faraway voice.

"12,500 galleons," said the Goblin promptly.

Harry thought for some time.

"Can I authorise a direct transfer of 1250 galleons from this vault to the Weasley family vault please."

“Of course,” said the Goblin, looking supremely disinterested in such a large transaction.

“And can you make it anonymous please?” asked Harry, still staring at the chest.

This time the goblin did look slightly suspicious but agreed nonetheless and five minutes later, Harry was hurtling at breakneck speed through the caverns towards the surface. However, the ride his body was nothing compared to the ride his mind was taken. If it was a preordained direct transfer, a little voice in his head whispered to him, that means that the bank knew that Sirius died...they knew he was dead...is that true?

Is he dead?

Then he corrected himself, does that mean he's dead forever?

As he emerged into the bright light of the outside world, Harry felt like he wanted to crumble onto the steps as the sobbing woman before him had, and although his pockets were now full of muggle money, his head was full of cotton wool – he couldn't think straight.

Barely conscious of what he was doing, his feet led him towards Knockturn Alley.

Kitty leant against the glass of the phone box, idling picking at the stickers that covered the inside of the booth as the phone rang in her ear. Harry still hadn't turned up and it had been nearly an hour, she was beginning to wonder if he'd done a runner and realised she wasn't the best person to be with right now.

“Hello?” came a voice at the end of the line, startling her slightly.

“Shell, yeah hi, it's me,” she said quickly.

“Cat!” said the voice angrily, before suddenly becoming hushed, “what the hell's going on?”

“I'm taking off for a while,” she replied quickly, ignoring her question.

“What? Have you gone completely insane?” demanded the girl on the other end of the line, “everyone is going spare over here!”

“Yeah exactly,” replied Kitty, looking around her anxiously.

“You’re dad man...” began the girl, before whistling impressively.

“What’s going on?” asked Kitty, dreading the answer.

“The shit has really hit the fan, he’s spread the word out about everything,” began the girl in a hushed voice, sounding as if she was trying not to be overheard, “who was this guy you were with?”

“Not important right now,” brushed off Kitty, “listen Shell, I need you to cover up for me for a while, you know, put the word out I’m in Newcastle or something...”

“What do you mean not important!” she asked angrily, “you properly lay out your dad, trash the place, steal his-”

“He started it,” growled Kitty, effectively cutting the girl off, “like always, do you think I was going to let him-”

“Like you said, not important,” she hissed back, “fact is you royally pissed him off and he wants it back Caz – he wants it all back.”

Kitty was silent for a few moments, continually picking at the peeling sticker advertising a female escort called ‘Madame Whiplash’. She looked over to where she’d last seen Harry and bit her lip.

“I’m not going back,” she said finally, “spread the word – I’ve disappeared right?”

“Caz, come on, be serious!” the girl demanded, “he’s going to get it back, one way or another...”

“All the more reason for me to be in Newcastle right?” agreed Kitty, anxiously nibbling at her thumbnail.

“Caz-“

"Shell, you're my friend right? Do this for me man," begged Kitty.

"I don't know if I can," said the girl, suddenly becoming even more hushed, "you're dad – well I can't really go against him can I? I need him..."

"Get your stuff off someone else?" said Kitty angrily, "do this one thing for me!"

"I can't."

"So drugs are more important than our friendship?" she accused furiously, "Do you know what he's going to do to me if he catches up?"

"Exactly the same thing as he'd do to me if he found out I was lying," Shell told her with an air of finality, "don't ring me again."

"Promise me you won't say anything to him!" begged Kitty quickly.

"I can't do that, I need him more than you."

The line went dead. Kitty started at the receiver in open mouthed shock, before slamming it back down.

"Thanks for nothing, bitch" she muttered.

Grumbling to herself she pulled a pocketful of change out and picked a few silvers out, ramming them into the slot a little harder than necessary. She listened to the rings, grinding her teeth.

"Yeah?"

"Hi Micky, it's me," she said in a rush.

There was a long silence.

"Je-sus Cath," he said finally, "you got some balls."

She gave a sigh, “Not you too man, has my stepdad got to everyone?”

“Hey – your dad scares everyone,” he said quietly, “what do you want?”

“A little help?” she asked with a nervous laugh.

“You think I’m going to help you after what you’ve done?” he asked incredulously.

“It’s only my dad,” she said worriedly, “why do you care?”

“I’m not talking about your dad Cath!” he hissed, “I wouldn’t care if his head had been smashed in, right? What I care about is that you’ve run off, again, and with some guy as well!”

She sighed heavily and grasped the phone rather tightly.

“Who is he?” he demanded.

“Can you cover for me, say I’m in Manchester?” she pleaded.

“Tell me who he is first?” he told her.

“Micky, come on, I need you to do this for me.”

“And I need you to do this for me, tell me who he is!”

“He’s-” she began, before pausing and looking over to where he’d disappeared, “its complicated...tell them Manchester yeah?”

“Complicated in what way? How is this complicated? I thought we we’re supposed to be together?” he asked her angrily, voice rising, “and then I don’t see you for over a week and I hear – from Jez of all people – that you’ve practically killed your dad, robbed him and took off with this guy!”

“Please Micky, you know what’s going to happen to me if we’re caught...” she pleaded, anxiety twisting her stomach into a knot.

"Yeah well, maybe you deserve it," he told her.

"That's harsh," she told him, sliding another silver into the slot.

"Well, you know, based on current circumstances, I'm feeling a little bitter," he told her, "and personally, I couldn't care less what's happens to you as you brought this upon yourself."

"Micky..." she said sadly.

"No Cath, no more ok? I'm sick of your lies and I'm tired of your games – so disappear if you want," he told her, "I don't care."

"Don't do this," she sighed wearily.

"You started it," he said simply, "see you around."

"Don't-" she began anxiously before a clicking noise reached her ears

"-hang-up," she finished lamely as the line went dead again.

Still muttering to herself she tried two more lines and got the same reaction, looked like the head hunters had practically been called in and the more she heard, the less she liked. Finally she gave up, there was no one out there, nobody to help her, no friend to cover her tracks. All she wanted was a little help for gods sake, someone to care.

She pulled a battered book out of the front pocket of her bag and searched through it for a while before picking the phone up again. This time it rang out and after two minutes of desperate waiting she gave up and dropped the phone. More searching located another number and she tried her luck again.

"791,336," answered a voice.

"Yeah hi, is Marcy there?"

"I'll just get her," said the voice wearily before a sudden yell made her jerk the phone away from her ear, "MARCY – IT'S FOR YOU!"

Kitty listened impatiently as Marcy made her way to the phone, watching her credit slip away.

"Hello?"

"Heya chuck, it's me," she said in the most cheerful voice she could muster.

There was a gasp on the other end of the line and then a clunk, as if the phone had been dropped. Finally a shaking voice echoed down her ear.

"Where the bloody hell have you been?"

"Nice to speak to you to," she joked, stomach still writhing.

"I'm serious Reeny," said the girl, sounding almost tearful, "I haven't seen hide nor hair of you for two years – we thought you'd been murdered or something!"

"Nothing so exciting I'm afraid," she said, "just got a bit bored, how are you?"

"Poor now you come to mention it – have you got that money you owe me?"

Kitty took a steadying breath – why was nothing going right for her?

"What money?" she asked idly.

"The money that you borrowed from me the day before you disappeared? Jesus Christ, did you even think that maybe I needed that!" asked the girl, not so much angry but incredulous, "I'll be back with it tomorrow you said!"

"Oh, that money," she said glumly.

The girl gave a snort of disgust.

"If this isn't a call to arrange a payback then I'm hanging up right this second."

"I haven't got your money Marcy," she began wearily, "but – if you help me out and let me crash with you for a few days I can get it, I prom-"

"You are unbelievable," said the voice, before the line went dead.

She pushed herself out of the phonebox and collapsed onto a nearby curb, wrapping her arms around her head as she tried to figure out what to do next. She thought about the way everyone had reacted and then thought about Harry for a long time.

Eventually she climbed to her feet and meandered her way to where she promised to meet him. When she walked into the café she ordered a large black coffee and chose a seat furthest to the back, suddenly fearful of sitting out by the window, just in case someone recognised her. Mind still very much on her phonecalls she laid her head on the table and wrapped her arms around it again.

Sometime later her coffee arrived but she ignored the waitress, trying to figure out what she could possibly do now.

"Hey, sorry I took so long."

She took her face out of her hands and looked up at the shadow that had fallen across her.

"Harry, hey," she said, rubbing her face quickly and trying to appear more collected.

"What's going on?" he asked her, worried look on his face.

"Oh...nothing really," she told him, mind still very much focussed on what had just happened.



He sat down next to her, propping his bag up on the table and hugging it protectively as he looked over to her.

“You look worried,” he told her, “what’s a matter?”

“I just rang around a few...friends...” she began, before looking down at her hands, realising how bad this was going to sound.

No one wanted to help her, no one even liked her, what kind of person was she?

He was looking at her curiously and she couldn’t even bear to tell him.

“We have to get out of here,” she told him finally, put on her best chronic liar voice, “my stepdad has told everyone what we did and he’s looking for us.”

He gave a surprised, worried look, twisting around and surveying the road beyond, as if he was about to storm down on them right there and then. She stared at the table wondering, what was Harry going to do? He had enough on his plate trying to dodge his own hunters without her own psychotic stepfather on the case.

He was going to split wasn’t he, she thought glumly.

“So,” he began and she prepared herself for the worst, “where to then?”

For a second she didn’t think she’d heard him right and looked up, staring at him blankly.

“You what?”

“Where are we going to go?” he said, giving her an odd look as if he didn’t understand the question.

She couldn’t help it, her face split into a wide grin – he still wanted to come? She gave a laugh and he smiled at her, looking politely confused.

“What?” he laughed when she couldn’t wipe the smile off her face.

“I don’t know, I just assumed you’d want to head off on your own now,” she said, taking a deep gulp of coffee.

“Why?” he asked, looking even more puzzled now.

“Well...because of my stepdad and everything,” she said.

“So?” he shrugged, “you didn’t care about the people after me?”

“Well...yeah...” she said, struggling to get her head around the idea, “right. In that case, I’ve got a few friends in the Midlands, we could stay with them?”

I hope, she added to herself worriedly.

“Great,” said Harry, unquestioningly, “train then?”

And that was it. They had a coffee and walked to the train station. And all the time Kitty couldn’t help but steal glances at him, feeling somehow slightly surprised and almost a little suspicious at this turn in her luck.

Any second now, she kept telling herself, he’s going to turn around and realise who he’s with.

But that second didn’t come, and she couldn’t understand why not. Tonks stared at the Gringotts letter in her hand, trying desperately to figure out what to do next. She had no money, no bank account, how was she going to pay back these fees, how was she going to pay her rent, how was she going to eat?

Her wages wouldn’t even cover her repayments...

“Tonks, everything ok over there?”

She jumped, looking around herself to find only the greenery of the bush she was sat in staring back at her. It took her a few more

disillusioned seconds to realise that the voice was coming from her wrist, which she raised to her mouth shakily.

“Wotcher Remus,” she said vaguely, staring down at the letter still.

“How is everything over there?”

She looked guiltily towards Number 4, Privet Drive. She’d been so busy thinking about her situation she hadn’t been watching or checking the house at all since she’d come on shift a few hours ago. However, a quick look over to Harry’s bedroom told her he was still in bed, the curtains were still drawn and there was no light on.

“Harry’s still in bed,” she replied, shifting slightly in her uncomfortable spot, “and my bums gone numb...”

“Still asleep?” asked Remus’ voice, echoing in the air around her eerily, “it’s nearly one in the afternoon-”

Tonks looked at her watch in shock, she hadn’t even registered the time either - where was her head today?

“-he doesn’t usually stay in bed this long,” Remus was saying and she shifted guiltily once again.

“I know,” she said, looking up towards his room, “but the past few days he has, maybe he’s depressed?”

“You think I should go back and talk to him don’t you? About what happened?”

He sounded worried and she gave a sigh.

“Maybe not yet Remus,” she replied cautiously, “how about I go and check in on him. Maybe I could ask him about Our Girl while I’m at it?”

“Do you really think he’ll tell you anything?”

“You never know,” she shrugged, “maybe we need a new angle on this, you know understanding...”

“Try it then,” he replied, sounding slightly odd, “I don’t fancy your chances though.”

“Alright Remus, I’m off in an hour, I’ll see you at the house?”

“Yeah, ok.”

Tonks stood up and stretched for some time, trying desperately to rub some life into her heavy limbs. The rejection letter from Gringotts that had previously been clutched in her hand was tucked into her robes and she surreptitiously pulled the invisibility cloak off.

She walked up the pristine path to the front door, and pressed the doorbell.

Petunia answered the door, took one look at Tonks and allowed a sneer to curl onto her lips. She obviously recognises me then, Tonks thought grimly.

“You’re here early,” Petunia said, nostrils flaring as she took in the robes she was wearing, “a day early.”

“I know Mrs Dursley,” she said as politely as she could muster, “it can’t have escaped your notice that Harry isn’t awake yet?”

“Or yours,” she said snidely, “he won’t get up.”

“Why not?” asked Tonks, anxiety creeping over her.

“I don’t know,” she said, looking Tonks up and down again, “he’s been like it ever since he got back...do you teach insolence at that school of yours as well now?”

“Can I speak to him?” cut in Tonks, annoyed now.

“No. Every three days was your deal and we’ve kept up our end of the bargain. I won’t have strangers traipsing in and out of my house

as and when they feel like it,” she said angrily, making to close the door.

Tonks stuck her boot in the crack and the door bounced harmlessly off it. Petunia made a noise that seemed half way between anger at her impudence and shock at her open display of hostility.

“Mrs Dursley,” cautioned Tonks in a firm voice, “either you stand aside and let me in to see Harry right now, or I will be forced to take action.”

Petunia glared at Tonks for a long moment, fighting against her desire to get rid of her, balanced with the fear of magic in her home. She was still trying to make her mind up when Tonks gave an irritated sigh and pushed the door open herself, walking past Petunia and heading towards the stairs.

“Honestly,” she scolded, retreating down the corridor to her kitchen and leaving Tonks to work in peace.

She climbed the stairs and waited outside Harry’s room for a second before giving the door a knock.

There was no answer.

“Harry? It’s Tonks!” she called through the door.

Silence.

She gave a sigh, wondering what was going on with him.

“Come on Harry,” she said, a little bit more desperately, “I just want a quick chat!”

She waited with baited breath, not even the sound of him stirring.

“Harry!” she tried, angrily this time, “stop being childish! At least speak to me.”

That should have irritated him enough into retorting she thought, waiting for a moment.

Still nothing.

"Fine Harry, if you're going to be like that, I'm coming in," she said finally.

She paused but he didn't shout at her so she pushed the door open and all at once she knew something was wrong. Her eyes fell on his bed, which even in the gloom she could see was curiously shaped. She rushed forward, yanking off the quilt to find not the sleeping teenager, only an artfully constructed assemblage of pillows.

"What the-" she said in mounting horror, spinning around to survey the rest of the room.

The desk was bare, the walls had lost their Gryffindor decorations, the bird cage stood open and empty and the wardrobe looked suspiciously bare. Her heart hammering madly against her chest she found his school trunk and pulled it open. Everything was neatly folded and laid into the trunk - sheaves of parchments - letters from his friends, spread across the top and Tonks only caught a few random sentences.

Harry, why aren't you talking to us...just write me a short note on the bottom of this and send it back...Hermione's taking it really personally...Harry, what are you playing at...I'm sorry about what happened... I'm very worried about you... friends are supposed to support each other, good times and bad...

Tonks stood up and surveyed the room one last time, as if she'd suddenly find him sitting on the bed, looking at her oddly. She put her face into her hands and gave a shuddering breath before raising her wrist to her mouth.

"Remus..." she whispered, staring at the wall in horror.

"Tonks, what's wrong?" he asked instantly.

“Get here now,” she replied in a shaking voice.

“Why what’s wrong?”

“Harry’s gone...he’s missing.”

Harry watched the scenery flashing past the train window, not unaware that this was the first train other than the Hogwarts Express he’d ever been on. It seemed such a long time ago now, sitting in that carriage on his own and Ron turning up, he smiled to himself sadly as he thought about how they’d banded together against Hermione who had been in full boss mode. Neville was there with Trevor too, Ginny had been on the platform and the Twins had been up to mischief further down the carriage. All the most important characters of his life introduced right there on the train, first day of school.

Looking back now, he couldn’t believe he was the same person, that Hermione had been the one who followed him and Ron to the midnight duel he was supposed to have with Malfoy, that Ron was practising turning Scabbers yellow...If he’d known then what he knew now, would he still have got on that train?

He frowned at his thoughts, wondering where Hermione and Ron were now, what they were doing and what they thought about his disappearance. For the first time since he thought about running away, he began to think about missing them, began to worry about what they thought. They’d stuck by him through thick and thin, and now he’d abandoned them.

You haven’t, he chided himself sharply, you not running away from them, you’re running away from life full of pain, misery, murder...you have to find out what happened to Sirius...

“You’ve got a real thoughtful look on your face again,” came Kitty’s voice next to him suddenly.

He looked across to her and gave a fake smile to show that he was perfectly fine. She merely raised her eyebrows at him, as if to say ‘Do you think that’s really going to work? Shame on you’.

“What’s up?” she asked him with a reassuring smile.

“Just,” he began, before shrugging, “thinking.”

“That’s bad for you, y’know,” she told him, only half joking.

He gave a half-hearted smile and looked at the scenery again, to think, they’d followed him into the depths of the Ministry, fought Death Eaters for him...and he’d left, without even saying goodbye...

“Do you wanna tell me?” she asked, nudging his shoulder with hers, “I can do serious sometimes?”

“Just thinking about my friends,” he said distantly, looking out the window now, “what they think...”

“About you leaving?” she asked and he nodded heavily, “well, it’s my experience that people usually forget after a while, sure they’ll be pissed off at you now, but eventually, y’know, they won’t care.”

Harry had been expecting the usual words of comfort, and he knew Kitty was trying her best, but her words acted like a bucket of cold water to the face. It wasn’t that he was thinking about Ron and Hermione now however, because he couldn’t, or wouldn’t believe that’s what they’d do, he was thinking instead about Kitty. He stared at her, obviously looking shocked because Kitty gave a frown.

“Sorry?” she said flatly, turning away, “I’m not very good at this crap.”

“No, it’s not that,” he said hurriedly, shifting in his seat to face her, “is that what happened to you?”

“Sure,” she said, sounding relieved she hadn’t annoyed him, “think about it Harry, how many people have you known in your life, and how many are you still friend with? Hardly any. You go through life making these friends, these people you couldn’t possibly live without, soul mates and everything, never been so close. And then one day, it just goes, and you drift apart...phonecalls stop, nights out dry up, and then it just ends. And for a while you’re sad, you can’t understand what happened, you feel like you should be making the effort...and then d’you know what you find?”



“What?” asked Harry, looking unusually pale.

“That you don’t miss them anymore,” she said, a faint trace of sadness in her voice.

Harry stared at her for sometime, trying to process everything she said. It sounded more horrible than he could put into words...would a day come were he suddenly wouldn’t care whether Ron was around to play chess with, wouldn’t be bothered that Hermione wasn’t bugging him about SPEW or homework, that Neville didn’t need help finding Trevor, that Ginny would be defiantly not fancying him?

Would he ever not miss them?

“It’s just the way of the world,” she said, a little more firmly now, “a day’ll come when you won’t even remember me, or if you do you just think, ‘I remember when...’, y’know?”

“Do you think that’ll happen?” he asked her, slightly taken aback at how accusatory he sounded.

“It usually does,” she said flatly.

It took him a few moments to realise that she had been pouring her heart out without him even realising it and he frowned slightly at the thought. She’d made him think she was talking about Ron and Hermione, but all she was doing was talking about herself, the friends she’d lost...

“Kitty, how many times have you run away?” he asked her, not surprised to see her expression closing down.

“Dunno,” she said offhandedly, giving a careless shrug.

Everything’s an act with her, he realised in a flash of understanding, you really have to dig to get through it, really have to work hard and gain her trust to even get the tinniest glimmer of truth. He picked up the coke bottle of his lap and studied the label for sometime, before looking at her thoughtfully.

“Go on, how many times?”

“I don’t know Harry,” she snapped, “Je-sus.”

She was only being tetchy because she thinks she has to, he reasoned with himself, she wants to tell you. She just wanted someone to give as good as she does, to be up front and to hell with the consequences.

“I tell you what,” he said nonchalantly, “you can ask me anything you like, and I’ll reply honestly, if you tell me how many times you’ve run away, and why.”

“That’s a crap game,” she said in a monotone, but he saw a flicker in her eyes that told him she was going to play.

“Ok,” he said airily, “I’ll just go back to sitting in silence then...”

He went back to the scenery and he could tell Kitty was fuming silently next to him over the obvious control he’d gained in the conversation. He grinned to himself, smug in the knowledge he’d found a way to crack Kitty, he knew she had a lever, everybody has one, and once you find it-

“Eleven times.”

“Huh?” he asked, looking across to her, disturbed from his gloating thoughts.

“That’s how many times I’ve ran away,” she said, a challenging look on her face.

He went from congratulating himself in getting an answer to shock at the actual number within a millisecond and was staring at her incredulously.

“Eleven times?” he asked blankly.

“Yep.”

"Eleven? One one?" he repeated, just to check.

"Yes, Christ Harry, sort you're hearing out," she laughed, and he realised she'd gained the upper hand again.

"That's a lot," he remarked.

She shrugged as if she didn't really agree and he let himself dwell on the number for a while. Eleven? That was nearly twice a year since she'd left Surrey...what could make someone want to run away that much?"

"Why?" he asked her in wonder.

"I can't remember," she said distantly.

"Stop procrastinating and tell me," he said flatly, trying a Kitty-technique.

"I don't even know what that means," she said irritably.

"It means stop avoiding the question and tell me Kitty," he said a little more softly this time, "rules of the game."

"Fine," she huffed, before taking a deep breath, "I just hated my life at that point...well most of it really..."

She gave a laugh and he waited for her to continue.

"You saw him Harry, you know what he's like...that's just what life with him was like, except it was towards my mom then instead of me," she gave another deep sigh and studied her hands, "then he got put away and they got divorced and my mom didn't have any money, but we ran away anyway, stayed with random family y'know? Then we ran out of family and money and he got out and came looking for us...I never liked being around at those points."

She fell silent, and Harry, who had been studying her face closely during her story felt some kind of action was needed. He reached

forward and took hold of her hand, lacing her fingers into his and giving it a gentle squeeze.

“Why,” he pressed, “what happened then?”

“Well, she was as bad as him, y’know? She’d take me to one of these women’s refuges, apparently to hide from him, but as soon as she ran out of money, she’d go back to him to get some...They deserved each other in the end, alcoholic and a crack addict.”

“She was on drugs?” he whispered in horror.

“Yeah...that’s how she died in the end,” she said, looking almost angry, “I’d run away at the time and she’d got us evicted anyway so...that’s it.”

Harry suddenly understood all the anger she carried around with her, he’d tried to figure out why she walked through life acting as if everything and everyone was personally offending her. Who could blame her when she’d had such a horrible life? It came out most when she was speaking about her parents, but especially her mother. It was if she’d accepted her stepfather was like that, as if he had some excuse, but she seemed bitterly resentful against her mother.

“How come you went back to your stepdads?” asked Harry, feeling confused.

“I got offered this choice a few months back,” she mused to herself, “and it was one of these moments where you can see your whole life unrolling before you and you can go down one way or you can go down the other, and be two completely different people at the end, but there’s no going back, you’re stuck like that...”

Harry nodded slowly, in one way she was making absolutely no sense at all, but on the other, she seemed to be speaking directly to his heart with no need to bypass through the brain.

“And I didn’t like the choice...I had no money, nowhere to live and no one to turn to,” she said, featuring darkening, “except him.”

Harry tried to imagine what the choice could have been, if the easiest option was to go and imprison yourself with that man in that place for as long as she could last.

“So there you go,” she said sarcastically, giving his hand a squeeze back, “the fascinating story of the Little Girl That Ran Away, exciting wasn’t it?”

“Not really,” he said quietly, still dwelling on how awful it was.

“Well, it’s my turn now,” she said, somehow managing to brush away the evil atmosphere.

“Ok,” he said slowly, “one question only and I’ll answer honestly.”

“Ok, my question is this, how did you get your scar?”

The kitchen was in uproar, all of the Order was there, and the news of Harry’s disappearance had just reached everybody. Mrs Weasley had burst into floods of tears which Arthur was trying to stem but failing miserably as she bewailed their security protections and predicted his death. Tonks was stood by the door, chewing on a lock of sombre black hair as she watched Moody trying rally everybody into sitting and calming down.

“Let’s just get the facts straight,” called Moody, as everyone began to assemble into some sort of order, “now as we all know Potter’s gone missing-”

“Wait Moody!” called Tonks suddenly.

Everyone stared at her as she turned around and wrenched the door open, to find Ron, Ginny and the Twins crouched behind it, Extendable Ears still crawling forwards.

“Give me those,” she said sharply, wrenching them away from the teenagers who all stood up and protested at once.

“What’s happened to Harry?” asked Ron at once, looking completely unembarrassed at being caught spying.

“Not now Ron,” she said, trying to shut the door on them.

This was met by howls of fury and Tonks quickly sealed the door with an imperturbable charm, screwing the Extendable Ears up in her hands.

“Go on Moody,” she nodded .

“Well maybe you can explain what’s happened,” he said accusingly and she gave a guilty squirm.

“I checked the house at one when I saw he hadn’t got out of bed yet,” she told everyone, unable to look over to Remus as it had only been his prompting that had woken her up.

“And?”

“His aunt said he hadn’t got up yet and when I went into his room I found out he wasn’t there,” she finished, staring at the floor.

“And magic had been used?” asked Emmeline anxiously.

“No,” replied Tonks and they all frowned somewhat, “no magic detected all week. Nobodies been to the house except the girl. The aunt says no ones been there this morning or last night.”

“I knew that girl was trouble!” cried Mrs Weasley, abandoning her hanky long enough to give them all accusatory stare, “I told you to do something about it!”

“I’ve been doing something about it,” snapped Tonks back.

“Not enough, you don’t even know her name! For all we know she could be some Death Eater in disguise!” spluttered Mrs Weasley as her husbands soothing pats on the back increased with the sound of her voice, “why didn’t we know he’d been taken!”

“Now we don’t know she’s involved yet,” said Kingsley, trying to soothe down the obviously high emotions of the room.

"It's a possibility though," added Hestia Jones thoughtfully and Tonks folded her arms and angrily stared at the floor.

"I got an address of where she lived," said Tonks in a forced calm voice, "Bill can find out her name and anything you want as soon as we get him into the Records Department of the Ministry."

"It's too late now!" cried Mrs Weasley dramatically.

"I'll do it anyway," said Bill in a comforting tone towards his mother, "Kingsley and Tonks were taking me in today. We should know all about her by tonight."

"Even so. We need to look at other possibilities too, right?" asked Doge in a wheezy voice, "other Death Eater plots, You-Know-Who must have planned something..."

"I don't think so," said Remus, speaking up for the first time, "I don't think he's been kidnapped."

Everyone began talking at once and he looked over to Tonks briefly. They'd already discussed this and she knew exactly how everyone would take it.

"What do you mean?" asked Moody gruffly.

"I think he ran away," said Remus.

His statement caused instant uproar and everyone began talking at once, drowned out by the continued sounds of Mrs Weasley sobbing.

"It's true," said Tonks in a loud voice, causing everyone to quieten down slightly and stare at her.

"Harry wouldn't run away," said Mrs Weasley fiercely.

"No sign of a struggle! No magic used! His bed was made up to look like someone was sleeping in it! He tidied his room and packed everything into his trunk neatly! His bag, clothes, and wand is gone?" asked Tonks angrily, "face it! He's run away!"

"I must say, it certainly doesn't surprise me," said a lazy voice from the corner.

Everyone looked over to Snape slightly angrily as he lounged back in his chair looking as if the news, far from worrying him, actually amused him.

Moody merely glared at him before he turned to survey everyone.

"I agree with Tonks and Lupin," he said, "it appears he has run away. BUT, this may also be a clever ruse by the Death Eaters to make us think that. So I want Bill to find out about Our Girl, I want Tonks and Remus to go over to her house and talk to her if she's there. I want the rest of you making subtle inquiries. IF he has gone, then we need to keep it quiet. No one outside this room can know that he's missing. If he has just run away then we don't want You-Know-Who taking advantage of it."

Everyone blanched at the thought.

"Is everyone clear?" he asked and everyone nodded silently, "good. Meet back here this evening. Dumbledore is back tomorrow, but I'll get in touch with him and get him back here."

Harry waited for Kitty to bring over their lunch, sitting bolt upright in the shiny plastic booth of the McDonalds as he worried about the Order. Had they found him yet, would the new anti-tracking charms and potions he'd had to pay serious gold for worked?

Would the last vial in his pocket work?

He curled his fingers around it, feeling the reassuring cold glass drumming his other hand on the table as he waited for her to return. Had they found him missing yet, could they trace Kitty quickly? Did they already know where he was? He began biting his thumb nail, staring unseeingly at the plastic model of some kind of clown as he toyed with the vial.

Was this the same as drugging someone? What if it was a bad potion? Would it hurt Kitty as she was muggle?



"Penny for your thoughts," came the voice behind him, causing him to jump, "woah, obviously nervous thoughts."

"Er, sorry, was miles away," he said, before giving her a weak grin, "looks good."

"Harry, McDonalds always looks good," she laughed, placing the tray down in front of him.

"Yeah, right, sorry," he babbled, dropping the vial back into his pocket.

Would it hurt her? He couldn't help worrying about this, he didn't tell the man it was for a muggle - would it matter? Maybe it would...what would he do if she got sick, he wouldn't be able to cope if he hurt her...

"Harry!"

"What?" he asked quickly, completely oblivious to whatever she had been seeing.

"Je-sus, wake up man," she said, handing him a milkshake, "are you worried or what?"

"A little," he admitted, trying to focus.

"Well, we've got a few days grace right - who's gonna think of looking for you here?" she reassured him, peeling the paper away from her straw.

Her words didn't comfort him as he thought of what Dumbledore was capable of and he reached into his pocket for the vial - how was he even going to get her to drink it?

"Anyway, look after my bag," she said suddenly, hoisting it over to him, "just going to the toilet."

He nodded as she wandered away and for a few moments he simply looked down at their tray of food, not being able to believe the gift she'd just handed him.

There sitting in front of him was her coke.

He felt the vial again and after a moments indecision, quickly pulled it out of his pocket, flicking the cork out and pulling her coke towards him. It was over in a few seconds, tipping in the colourless liquid which sank out of sight. He picked up her straw and began to stir it in feverishly.

"You'll make it flat," came a whisper in his ear.

He nearly dropped it on the floor, jumping it about a mile and letting out a yell. Several people turned around to stare at them.

"Seriously Harry," she began to laugh hysterically, "calm down! You'll give yourself a heart attack."

"Right," he said, pushing her coke away and trying to hide his shaking hands underneath the table.

"What were you doing?" she asked curiously, picking up the coke and giving it the briefest glance.

"Dunno," he shrugged, "just bored, got mesmerised by the bubbles."

He cringed to himself - was that the best he could come up with?

"You're so strange," she said, shaking her head and sipping her drink.

He watched with baited breath. She gave a slight frown and he felt his heart actually stop beating.

"You did make it flat," she complained.

"Sorry, do you want mine?" he asked quickly.

“Come on Harry, I hate banana milkshake,” she told him with a laugh and a shrug, “it’s not that bad. Still coke right?”

“Right,” he said breathlessly, still watching her taking a deep gulp.

His heart had started beating again now, but thumping painfully against his ribcage.

Remus pulled his battered muggle overcoat around him, self-consciously comparing his clothes to those around him – he was never quite sure if he got it right. He glanced over to Tonks who seemed to be breezing through the streets, giving not even the slightest bit of attention to whether muggles did in fact wear purple tights beneath blue skirts with matching hair colour.

“Do you wear muggle clothes a lot?” he asked her curiously, noticing he’d just seen someone walk passed with the same tee-shirt as her on.

“I do with work a lot and visiting my folks, but they’re not as comfortable as robes,” she said thoughtfully, checking the street signs, “but you do get the feeling of being more individual, showing off your own personal style, you know?”

“I never really got the hang of them,” he said, looking down at his combination, “oh, over there – Tower Street.”

“We live and learn,” she remarked vaguely, as both their gazes were drawn upwards to the huge block of flats that had suddenly blocked out the sun.

“Mandela House?” asked Remus, already knowing the answer.

They walked passed a large red plastic sign that probably once portrayed the name of the building but now was a testament to the changing fashions of graffiti. They stood staring up at the edifice for a few moments, both thinking the same thing but not voicing it.

“Well, let’s go,” he said finally, squaring his shoulders and heading towards the heavy looking door, “18d right?”

She gave a nod and they walked through the entrance met by their next choice, lifts or stairs. Remus stared at the doors with an air of polite mistrust, the doors were jammed open half way with a traffic cone so all the cables were exposed.

“Looks like we’re walking,” joked Tonks, heading for the stairs.

The 18th floor, Remus soon realised, was a very long way up, especially when the stairs were thronged with people coming up and down, some shouting to others higher up, others pulling pushchairs up backwards or carrying bags of shopping. He’d nearly been sent flying by a group of young kids who couldn’t have been more than 11 or 12 who were running as fast as they could down in what sounded like a very violent chase.

Tonks ploughed on ahead, face set in a grim mask of concentration as Remus let the conversations wash over them – what was on TV tonight, the latest gossip from the celebrity world, rumours of flat 15c...nothing about a new boy on the 18th floor. He was surprised however at the language, some mild curses were used in the magical world, a few of the more colourful ones by Mundungus or the Weasley clan if they were out of earshot of Molly, but nothing like this...

“Here we are, 18th floor,” said Tonks, pushing the door on the stairwell open to reveal a long corridor, open on one side to the elements by way of a balcony.

“Flat 18d,” he pointed out, as they came to a stop outside a battered looking door with a rusty number screwed onto it.

Tonks gave him a look, before raising a fist and knocking on it loudly and clearly. They waited for a few moments before she repeated the action and Remus wondered who would eventually open the door – Our Girl? Would Harry still be there? Her parents perhaps...

However after several minutes it was clear that no one was home and Tonks looked up to him expectantly.

“Try the neighbours?” he asked her, knowing already what she wanted to do.

She nodded and moved to the next door, knocking on it and awaiting as the sounds of movement from within grew louder.

A young girl, perhaps no more than 7 or 8 opened the door and stared up at them expectantly.

“Wotcher,” smiled Tonks, leaning down slightly to talk to the girl, “is she not in?”

“Oo?” asked the girl, scratching her nose.

“Next door, I’ve tried knocking but no ones answering,” she replied and Remus was silently impressed that she managed to sound like she knew the girl next door, even though she hadn’t said her name.

The girl looked Tonks up and down, taking in the boots, brightly coloured tights and small skirt.

“Cathy’s gone,” she said finally, obviously Tonks had gained her approval.

“Gone?” she frowned, “where?”

“Dunno, left last night inna hurry,” she shrugged, “probably her dad. Why d’you want her?”

“She was supposed to meet me in town,” lied Tonks as Remus stared at her significantly, “do you know when she’s going to be back?”

“Dunno, he sounded pretty angry...” said the young girl, scratching her nose again, “you know what he’s like...he been round all of ours asking about her. Reckon she’s in big trouble...”

“Really?” asked Tonks, even more puzzled now - this didn’t sound like Death Eater activity.

"Yeah, big row, lots a fightin'," said the girl, "as usual. I'll miss her, she's real cool."

"You don't think she's coming back?"

"Nah, I wouldn't, said she was gonna leave ages ago anywho," the girl told her, looking slightly upset now.

"Yeah I know," Tonks lied, "any idea where she'd go?"

The little girl shrugged, and Tonks gave a grim smile, "Thanks a lot."

The door was shut and Tonks turned to Remus incredulously.

"What do you think of that?"

"Sounds like she went missing last night," he said grimly, "sound familiar?"

"It can't be a coincidence can it?" she said, "Molly was right...they've run away together haven't they?"

"And I don't think its because she's a Death Eater," he added, rubbing his face with his hands, "I bet they've been planning this for ages...when I walked in on them the other day - how else could he have got past us?"

"What are we going to do now?" she asked him, leaning against the wall heavily.

"Let's try her house again," he suggested and she raised her eyebrow.

Remus turned his back to the door, scanning the corridor as he tried his best to shield her from view.

"All clear," he muttered.

"Alohamora."

There was a small click and the sound of a chain sliding back slowly then dropping against the door. Looking around again carefully, she darted inside and he quickly followed, shutting the door and immediately losing his vision.

"Whoa," said Tonks, "hope I'm not the only one with sudden and dramatic loss of eyesight."

"Lumos," whispered Remus by way of an answer and the small hallway was flooded in golden light.

They looked around for a few seconds in silence.

"I've said it once and I'll say it again," said Tonks weakly, "Whoa."

"Be careful," he agreed, ushering her forwards.

He edged his way through the mountain of rubbish that blocked the corridor, boots crunching into broken glass. Tonks gave a cringe at the sound and also lit her wand, before entering into the lounge. Again they surveyed it for a few moments in silence, eyes flicking from item to item with a sinking feeling in their hearts.

"This place makes my flat look like a palace," she remarked, wandering over to what had once been a table in the centre of the room.

She bent down and surveyed the wreckage of the glass, shortly joined by Remus, who prodded around gingerly. He picked up a piece and held it up so they could both see the red stain and shared a significant look. Tonks didn't ask how Remus had spotted the blood amidst all that glass, he had a knack for that sort of thing.

"Broken table, dislodged furniture, pictures fallen off the wall," noted Tonks, looking around the place, "you know what that says to me?"

"A fight?" Remus agreed, also seeing the disturbance through the general mess of the place, "The girl next door said a row, fighting...I wonder what happened?"

“Let’s find out,” she said, raising her wand as he did the same, “on the count of three? One, two, three, reveleos!”

A set of shining footprints suddenly entered the room and they watched it pacing and crossing the room ceaselessly until Tonks grew bored and sped it up. Over 12 hours was rewound until suddenly three set of footprints were in the room, and one of them was red.

“Pause,” commanded Tonks when the footsteps had got to the point when they were first in the room together.

All three of them stops in their tracks and Tonks and Remus stared at them. The largest of the three, the first set they’d seen was stood by the door, the second, smaller pearly white ones was over in the wreckage of the table. The red ones were halfway down the hall.

“Her dad, Our Girl and Harry you’re thinking?” guessed Tonks, staring at the red tracks.

“Red’s the colour of magic, who else could it be?” asked Remus.

“So what, she was in here with her dad when Harry comes running in...” here she let the tracks play out their role.

As Harry entered the room, they saw the father step away from the girl as the footsteps briefly disappeared, before the outline of a body glowed through the glass, “Pause!”

“She fell through the table,” said Tonks in a shocked voice, picking up the bloody glass again.

“Or was pushed,” said Remus and she looked up sharply.

She looked at the footprints and commanded them to continue.

“Harry walks in, sees her lying there and then...” began Remus, watching what was happening.



The red footprints suddenly zoomed across the room towards the sofa.

“...he gets thrown over,” continued Tonks, “and then the father comes...”

Both set of footprints suddenly scurried back in unison until they were almost against the wall before Harry’s disappeared altogether.

“Wait! What’s happened?” she demanded, looking around the room as she paused the tracker.

Remus ran a hand across the wall where the man’s footprints were pointing towards, deep in concentration. His fingers ran across a nail sticking out, obviously for a picture and he looked down at the floor. Sure enough, there lay a frame, glass smashed.

“He was pushed up against the wall,” said Remus quietly.

“Bastard,” said Tonks savagely and Remus couldn’t help but agree as she began the tracker again.

They started at where Harry’s feet should have been, waiting desperately. Tonks nearly cried out in relief when they landed again, quickly followed by his hands and knees.

“Our Girl had come up behind him,” pointed out Remus, and they both watched as the scuffle began all over again between the whiter footprints.

They watched as the entire fight folded out beneath them, trying to put actions to the tracker and the girl fell again, got up, Harry fell over and got up, then the stand off, almost a minute where no one moved until finally the mans outline could be seen on the floor. For only one more minute were the two’s footprints visible until they ran for the door and disappeared where they couldn’t track them.

“This was a serious fight,” said Tonks finally, after they’d both processed the events, “they would almost certainly have been wounded, especially her – she fell through a glass table!”

"Maybe we should check the local hospitals, we could get lucky," he suggested and she nodded mutely.

They both thought about what they had seen for a few more moments before Remus sighed, squared his shoulders and looked over to her, "So what does this mean?"

"It means...Harry and Our Girl - Cathy - they were here last night, fought with her father and ran away...Together."

"Molly's going to love this," he sighed and stared at the smashed table once again.

"But do you know what, I really don't think this is a Death Eater trap, it's just too...too muggle. I think Harry's met this girl, fallen in love with her and they've run away together."

Remus stared at her.

"Why?" was all he could say, "why would they run away?"

"When you're in love you do stupid things," said Tonks, looking away, "who knows?"

"We better go back and tell everyone about this..." he said finally with one last look around the flat.

The news that the mysterious girl, now known only as the illusive Cathy, had also gone missing last night caused even more commotion within the small kitchen of Grimauld Place, especially the news of the fight Harry had been involved in. Tonks didn't think she could stand being in that room listen to Mrs Weasley trying not to cry, Snape adding unhelpful comment and smirks, Moody talking about 'the enemy' and seeing Remus trying to cover her mistakes from the morning.

Thing is it wouldn't take them long to get over the shock and realise that Harry gone missing and she hadn't even noticed, qualified Auror?

She zoned back into the conversation to hear them arguing over what to do next when the doorbell rang suddenly. Charlie jumped up and rushed past her to get it, obviously as eager as her to get out of the situation.

"I've got us a name!" came the yell as soon as the front door had slammed shut and everyone in the kitchen's ears pricked up.

They looked over to the door to see it burst open, Bill striding through with a veritable storm of parchment fluttering in his wake. He dropped to the floor to pick them all up looking flustered and excited.

"Our Girl?" asked Tonks, straightening up and looking alert, "Cathy?"

"Yes!" he wheezed, trying to pull air back into his lungs from his run.

"Well, who is she?" demanded Remus in a hoarse voice, on his feet without realising.

"Her name is Catherine Earl, Cathy to her friends as we know," began Bill, throwing the papers onto the table and surveying the assembled group proudly.

"What else?" demanded Kingsley in his deep, powerful voice.

"She's ah, one of, let me just check, yes, one of four children, three stepbrothers by her stepfather," said Bill in a rush as quills scratched away to his voice, "you're going to love this, he's what the muggles call on the Dole, meaning he's unemployed, served five years at Featherstone Prison, for armed robbery and assault."

"Nasty character," said Moody gruffly, nodding for Bill to continue.

"Mother's been dead for two years, died of massive overdose taken in the family home on Christmas Eve can you believe it, died the next day in a muggle hospital."

"So who was she living with at this point?" asked Tonks, looking shocked and saddened.

"I'm not quite sure, she seems to disappear regularly from time to time, appearing on certain school registers around the Midlands area until six months ago when her stepfather starts claiming child benefits for her care," said Bill, who was rushing on ahead breathlessly.

"So she's a serial runaway," said Moody slowly, as if he'd suspected nothing else.

"And now she's got Harry!" said Mrs Weasley, hand over mouth.

"You said she was going to school in the Midlands?" asked Remus thoughtfully, thinking this explained the accent.

"Yeah, I've managed to find her name cropping up on about 13 different school registers already and that's only in one county borough," said Bill in amazement, shuffling through the parchments and pulling out a piece, handing it to Remus, "she doesn't stay in one place for too long, often being expelled for various reasons."

"Such as?" Mrs Weasley said, looking horrified.

"Failing classes or exams mostly. She's described by a few schools as being 'desperately underachieving', grades are awful, in fact there's a chronic lack of them, but a few schools expelled her for various counts of being caught smoking on school property, cutting classes, fighting in the playground, they usually cite unreasonable behaviour...she's got everything."

"Smoking eh?" laughed Mundungus, raising his pipe in acknowledgment, "I knew I liked this girl for a reason, got a bit of personality!"

"It's disgraceful," said Mrs Weasley looking mortally offended at the news.

"She called that plonker Vernon a prick," he reminded everyone.

They all, in their own way, gave her an extra point for that, even though Mrs Weasley admonished him for his language.

"Well, look at the parents," she continued, bustling about anxiously, "you'd expect nothing less than a ruffian with a family like that - dare I ask what happened to her stepbrothers?"

"One of them is in the fathers self-same prison, something called ABH, I'm not sure what that is-"

"Actual Bodily Harm," supplied Tonks grimly, "means he beat the living daylight out of somebody."

Mrs Weasley sucked in the breath between her teeth and tutted loudly.

"Another's currently living in Manchester, also signed onto the Dole -"

"Figures," said Moody darkly.

"And the last one has been registered Missing for the past 8 months."

"A whole family of scoundrels!" Mrs Weasley cried, tears springing to her eyes, "rotten to the core and now she's kidnapped Harry!"

"I don't think she's kidnapped him Molly," said Kingsley slowly, "no sign of a struggle, certain key items missing from his room? Lets face it, he's run away with her hasn't he?"

"Eloped!" she cried even louder now, "off to live a life of shame!"

"I don't think he's eloped Molly," said Remus wearily, pinching the bridge of his nose again, "anything else you can tell us Bill?"

"Not much else from the records about her personal life, friends, that's sort of stuff, but we do have wage sheets for various jobs as barmaid and waitress in a few pubs."

"She's too young to serve," said Tonks at once, "I take it she's 16 like Harry."

"Yeah she is, birthday was yesterday in fact. But I guess she either looks older than she is or the place she works at doesn't care - they

don't look like high class establishments. Most recent is the Greyhound and Rabbit, down at something called a racetrack."

"Racetrack?" asked several of the members at once.

"Dog racing," supplied Tonks, "you get a line of them and put bets on which one will run around the track fastest."

"Odd," said Moody gruffly, taking an instant dislike to the sport.

"Bets you say?" asked Mundungus, rubbing his chin thoughtfully.

"It's a mugs game," Tonks said flatly.

"Of course, of course," he said absentmindedly.

"Well, for the record," said Bill, sensing a storm brewing, "she used to live near to Harry, they went to Primary School together until she moved away at 8 years old to Wolverhampton with her mother when her parents divorced. So that's where they knew each other from."

"I knew it!" cried Tonks, looking smug.

"And that's about it, just a few medical records for various hospitals - broken bones mainly, cuts that needed that thing with the thread and needle that dad had. I tell you what, I feel sorry for muggles - look how often they're in and out getting this shoddy excuse for healing! Did you know it's a minimum six weeks between breaking your bone and having it healed!"

Everyone murmured that they too couldn't believe how long it took for muggles to heal as Tonks rolled her eyes.

"Can I see that?" she asked, taking the medical records from Bill and looking through them.

"Why wait so long?" Molly was asking, looking mistrustful of muggle healing as she often did, "don't they have enough healers?"

"No, that's how long it takes for a bone to naturally repair itself," Kingsley told her, "I've heard they put stone around the arm to make it stop moving and heal but -"

"You know," broke in Tonks, sounded slightly worried, "Bill's right, she's in and out of the hospital a lot. A lot more than is normal...no muggle injures themselves this much..."

"Probably fighting," muttered Mrs Weasley darkly.

"Perhaps," said Tonks in a far away voice, "and always for the same thing, broken arms...cuts...almost like..."

She broke off, talking away to herself as she raised her arms to protect her face experimentally, "Like defensive..."

Mrs Weasley continued to mutter and they began to talk amongst themselves about the news. Moody and Kingsley were planning the next course of action as Molly batted Mundungus's legs off the table and went to the stove to put on the kettle and Remus looked over to Tonks, who was still practising protecting her face and consulting the notes.

"What are you thinking?" he asked in a low voice, watching her repeat the motion again.

"Don't you think it's odd that she's getting broken arms here," she asked, pointing to the inside of her arm, "that's quite hard to do right? I suppose if you fall like this, but then that's awkward and not common...But if you raised your arms up, like this, then to deflect a blow you'd be bound to be hit..."

"Bill said she's been in trouble for fighting before," Remus said, thinking he may understand where she was coming from and not liking it.

"For fighting yes, but this," she repeated the motion, covering her head, "this is a defensive posture, this is someone trying to protect themselves, their face."

Remus looked at the parchment thoughtfully, Tonks was right there were an awful lot of the same injuries. She dropped her arms finally, noticing the look Moody and Kingsley were giving her.

"They think she's a fighter," said Remus.

"Maybe she is," admitted Tonks thoughtfully, "but so was I...I just can't believe that she's as bad as all this makes her out to be."

"She's certainly got the family for it," said Remus, trying to test what Tonks' mind was on.

"But maybe she's not like her family?" said Tonks, pleading to him to see her point of view, "I can't believe that Harry would trust her like he does if she wasn't a good person..."

"I agree with you there," said Remus heavily, "as different as Harry has been these past few weeks, I don't think he'd ever put himself in danger like this..."

"And when I saw her in the park, she seemed quite reasonable," continued Tonks, ignoring Moody's grimace at her, "she and Harry were very...I don't know, close. It seemed to me that they'd known each other a long time."

"Well, we all know appearances can be deceiving," said Remus, casting an eye back over the notes, "but just look at her entire family, how can a child grow up in a situation like that and not be affected?"

"Come on Remus, you know that's a rubbish statement - just look at who Harry grew up with!" she pointed out, "And Sirius, just look at his family..."

"And yours," muttered Remus, turning his attention back to the notes as his cheeks tinged slightly.

Tonks realised he must be embarrassed about what he said the night she found him drunk in Sirius' room but brushed this away, now wasn't the time to be thinking about things like that.



"So let's just think about this," she continued briskly, "what we need to do is think. Harry knows he can't run forever so I'm guessing he's gone to do something specific right?"

Moody and Kinsley had joined the conversation again, sidling over when they heard her beginning to put forward theories.

"To do something?" asked Kingsley.

"Or to visit someone," said Remus thoughtfully.

"Well we all know that Harry wouldn't have done something like this if it wasn't important, he must have known we wouldn't have allowed him to do, or see, whatever it is..." Tonks mused, brushing her black hair away from her eyes.

"He's been very preoccupied with Sirius," said Remus, calm voice betraying the pain in his eyes, "that's the only thing I could think that would drive him to leave everybody like this..."

"Unless it's Our Girl," added Moody, tapping a gnarled finger to her school records, "this girl, Cathy or whatever she's called, unless she's the one who wanted to run away and he's followed her..."

"Hmmm," Tonks said, obviously not buying Moody's theory but not wanting to say, "I vote we get Cassandra in, we're in over our heads when it comes to things like this."

"Not Cassandra," pleaded Kingsley at once as Moody growled along side him.

"That fraud has no place here," he said, eye spinning madly in his socket at the thought.

"She is not a fraud!" protested Tonks indignantly.

"No she's worse - she's a scientist," he said, obvious distaste in his mouth, as if saying a dirty word.

"In the muggle world scientist are held in high esteem," said Tonks coldly as the three men rolled their eyes at her.

"I don't really think she has any place here Tonks," said Remus kindly, patting her arm.

"I think she'd be perfect," she maintained, obviously irritated at the men, "we need to know what going on in their heads if we want to get him back! And I really don't appreciate your pure-blooded view on muggles!"

"Were not being pure-blooded," said Kingsley, his deep voice rumbling around the room, "but any muggle that thinks they can read someone's mind is-"

"She doesn't read peoples minds," she said through gritted teeth, "how many times do I have to tell you? She's a psychologist - they explain human behaviour and emotions! She's done excellent work in St Mungo's with her therapy cases hasn't she?"

"Everyone needs someone to talk to," growled Moody, obviously not buying this 'psychologist' thing for an instant, "of course she's going to get results if she talks to those that people have given up on."

"For Merlin's sake! You are all so narrow minded!" cried Tonks frustratingly, "you think everything muggle has got to be worse! You just don't like Cassandra because she always analyses you and you don't like hearing the truth about yourself!"

"That's because everything has to do with your childhood," Moody replied, looking deeply irritated.

"Well maybe it does," snapped Tonks, getting to her feet, "I don't care what your thoughts on her are, I'm going to overrule you! And when Dumbledore gets back he'll say yes straight away because he appreciates that something's in the muggle world are far superior!"

She marched straight over to the fireplace and disappeared in a puff of green flames and the three men were silent for a few moments.

"Scientist," muttered Moody, and they all gave a short laugh.

## Chapter Eight

If I swallow anything evil,  
Put your finger down my throat,  
If I shiver, please give me a blanket,  
Keep me warm, let me wear your coat.

Nightfall was already descending when they approached the looming multi-storey building, grey concrete thick with dirt, oppressive feeling only heightened by the heavy rain. Kitty motioned for him to follow her as they darted into the entranceway, stopping to shake the rain off them, Harry trying his best to squeeze the water out of the sleeves of his jumper.

Kitty pushed her braids out of her eyes and surveyed the lifts, one door was jammed open halfway, covered in graffiti and dents. The light inside the lift was flickering violently.

“Guess we’ll take the stairs,” said Kitty in a dry voice, heading for the stairwell.

As they climbed several people passed them, most not giving them a second glance, quite busy and contented with their own lives, while some actively watched them. Harry felt particularly intimidated when a group of boys that could have been only a year younger than him stared at them, talking in loud whispers.

“What you fucking looking at?” muttered one of them, smacking Harry’s shoulder with his own as they passed on the stairs.

Harry merely glared at him and carried on walking up, as a few more passed, staring at Kitty. There was a wolf whistle from one of them.

“Aye aye, sexy!” whistled another as they passed, “how much for a night?”

The group began to laugh and Harry glared at another, desperate to shut him up but definitely not wanting to get into another fight - his jaw was still throbbing and a nasty bruise now gave away his previous nights activities.

“Did you see the tits on her,” snickered another, making a crude gesture.

Kitty marched straight up without even flinching and when they were about two floors she leant over the rail and shouted down the stairwell;

“Fucking pricks!” she yelled, so that her voice reverberated around the concrete walls.

“Fuck you, whore!” came the reply, to which Harry spun around angrily.

“Probably not the best idea,” said Kitty grabbing his arms, looking almost sad about the fact, “bastards.”

He gave a slight nod, turning back around and climbing the rest of the way in silence. Harry sincerely hoped they didn’t run into another stairway gang. However, they reached their floor without another encounter and Kitty led the way onto a partially open corridor that overlooked a sort of playground come car park below. Harry looked down to see the gang of boys they’d encountered on the stairs standing around a bench with several girls, all smoking. For the first time he wondered if everyone his age in the muggle world smoked and then if there was a magical equivalent to it before shaking his head and dispelling the thoughts, he didn’t know and he wouldn’t ever get the chance to find out, and good riddance.

“So, who lives here?” asked Harry, catching up with Kitty as she strode down the corridor.

“My old best friend, Donna Grace,” said Kitty, taking a sudden turn left, “haven’t seen her for about two years and I’m not too sure what she’ll think...”

“That doesn’t sound very promising,” he said with a frown, “what did you do?”

“Nothing,” she snapped, still striding along quickly.

“Hey, what’s up with you?” asked Harry, suddenly noticing she had a very angry look on her face and was striding a little too purposefully down the corridor.

“Nothing,” she repeated, taking another turn.

“If it’s those gits on the stairs-” he began.

“No, it’s not,” she cut in, before stopping in front of a door with the number 56a painted on it, “it’s just...I used to live here.”

Harry looked at her in surprise, “What, here?”

“Next door but one,” she said, jerking a thumb over her shoulder, “I tell you what, you think my dads place was rank, try living here...”

“It doesn’t look like the nicest place in the world,” he admitted, wanting to say much more than that but not wanting to offend her.

“You’re telling me,” she said with a particularly evil look on her face, “this place in a fucking shit hole.”

She stared at the door silently and Harry gave her an uneasy look, wondering how much of a blast from the unwanted past this must have been. It would be like him being related to the cupboard under the stairs again - all at once Harry decided he hated this place. He suddenly realised she hadn’t made any move to knock the door or make her presence known and he looked across to her.

“Are you ok?” he asked uncertainly.

“Of course.”

She raised her hand to knock, before hesitating.

“Are we going to be welcome?” he guessed shrewdly.

“Of course,” she repeated, squaring her shoulders and rapping on the door with a heavy hand.

Harry understood this to mean that Kitty didn't have any idea if they would be welcome or not and was about to inquire further when he heard the sound of bolts sliding back and the door was opened a couple of inches, held shut by a chain. A pair of wide blue eyes looked between the crack.

"Who is it?" asked a disinterested voice.

"Donna?" asked Kitty, moving closer to the door.

"What the-" came the now disbelieving voice behind the door, which slammed shut.

Harry gave Kitty a worried look, but she merely waited patiently. There was the sound of the chain being drawn back and the door was suddenly flung wide.

A tall girl, probably about 18 years old stood on the threshold, staring at them in open mouthed shock. Harry glanced at Kitty quickly who had a slightly nervous look in her eyes, yet a huge smile plastered on her face.

"Caz...?" whispered the girl, a number of emotions passing across her face.

"That's my name, don't wear it out," she grinned, appearing cheerful but sounding worried.

Harry notice that the supposedly happy reunion was overshadowed by tension.

"I don't believe it..." the girl said weakly, before suddenly moving towards her.

Kitty flinched slightly as if she was about to be struck but the girl merely wrapped her arms around her, laughing to herself.

"What the hell are you doing here?" she asked in a confused voice, "I haven't heard from you in like, a million years or something!"

"Two actually," laughed Kitty, hugging the girl back happily, "What you been up to man! Sorry I never got in touch."

"Yeah - I thought you'd been murdered or something," she said, suddenly serious as she held Kitty at arms length and studied her, "or gone into hiding or something at least..."

Kitty laughed, slightly uneasily and Donna turned his way, eyes landing on him as he gave a weak smile.

"Donna, this is my boyfriend Harry," said Kitty, motioning to him, "Harry, this is my partner in crime."

"Hi," he said with a small wave, feeling suddenly embarrassed at being introduced as a 'boyfriend', it was a new thing for him and was somehow surprised at Kitty for saying it.

"Alright?" she asked with a friendly enough smile, before turning back to Kitty.

"So er what....well...you wanna come in?" she asked, looking unsure of what to do or say next.

"Yeah, that's be magic," she laughed and followed Donna in.

Harry trailed in behind her, shutting the door and instantly loosing all light sources. He tried to follow Kitty's bobbing head, noting that whilst being tidier than Kitty's old home, it was definitely smaller. They suddenly emerged into the kitchen come living room, inside which was a couple of couches, a tv and a small table, on which were the remains of the last meal.

"Drink?" asked Donna, showing them sofas and walking over the fridge, "I know what you'll be having Caz, coke right?"

"Would I drink anything but?" she asked with a laugh, dumping her bag by her ankles.



"I dunno, we got some vodka round here you could top it up with," said Donna, handing her the glass, "Smirnoff, your favourite."

"Ha ha," said Kitty sarcastically, before adding, "maybe later."

"Harry, what you wanting?" said Donna.

"Same'd be good," he said, gratefully taking the glass when she brought it over, sitting down opposite.

"So, what's the story?" she said, tucking her feet beneath her as she curled up on the sofa, "after everything that happened you're back here? No news for two years was it, and suddenly here you are?"

Kitty gave her rucksack a little kick by ways of explanation and Donna's face registered a sudden look of comprehension.

"Oh no...you didn't?" she moaned, putting her drink on the table, "not again?"

Kitty gave a sheepish grin.

"Not your fucking mom with your stepdad again?" she said, looking angry.

"Not exactly," said Kitty easily, leaning back in her sofa, "it's a bit of a long story."

Donna gave her a look that said she had all day.

"My stepdad actually," she admitted and Donna looked confused.

"Huh? He caught up with your mom again?"

"Nah, she's dead," said Kitty and Harry couldn't help but stare at her as much as Donna, who had gone white.

"What? No...Oh my God...How?" she whispered, sounding horrified, "not your stepdad...?"

“Nah,” she shrugged, “OD’d last year.”

“Oh Caz,” said Donna, looking quite taken aback, “I’m so sorry, I knew she was going to get in trouble if she carried on like she was here...”

“Yeah well,” said Kitty, looking quite unaffected by the conversation, “shit happens.”

“Typical you,” said Donna with a small, sad smile and Harry nodded in recognition, he’d noticed how she acted around the subject.

Kitty merely gave her a small shrug of the shoulders.

“So, what’s the story - did she mean to do it?” asked Donna, steely look of disapproval in her eyes.

Kitty hesitated, eyes flicking to Harry for a moment and he looked at her thoughtfully, he didn’t know what had happened and he got the feeling Kitty wouldn’t have told him unless he’d pushed her.

“I dunno,” she shrugged finally, taking a large gulp of her coke, “who knows?”

Donna frowned and glanced at Harry for a moment too.

“Well, what was it, pills or the-”

“I just said I didn’t know, didn’t I?” snapped Kitty suddenly, taking both Harry and Donna by surprise.

There was an uncomfortable silence as Donna fought to stop her retort and Harry tried to catch Kitty’s eye with a questioning look. Kitty however seemed to have made some kind of decision and took control of the situation.

“I wasn’t around at the time ok?” she said, trying to lighten her tone, “So I don’t really have all the gory details.”

“Gory details?” cut in Donna incredulously.

Harry thought that Kitty's friend really didn't know her too well, if she kept interrupting like this Harry could see her getting really angry.

"Yeah," was all Kitty said, "toilet down the corridor yeah?"

She jumped to her feet instantly and Donna directed her away. Harry immediately realised that he was stuck on his own with the girl and he looked around the room uncomfortably, casting for a conversation topic.

"So, Harry is it?" she said, also getting to her feet and needlessly rearranging items on the coffee table.

"Yeah," he nodded quickly.

"Right...you're not from around here then?" she said, obviously noting his accent.

"No, Surrey," he explained, before falling silent.

Great time to become tongue tied he cursed himself - why couldn't he think of anything to say? He drummed his fingers on his knee as he watched her tidy up in silence. Donna was quite tall for a girl with high cheekbones and sharp features that were even further highlighted by her the fact her hair was scraped back into a messy bun. He thought she looked a little burned out and was acting as if highly tense, compulsively moving things around the room. He wondered if Kitty's visit was 100 welcome and if sensing his thoughts she looked over to him suddenly and he glanced away, cheeks flushing at being caught staring.

"That's a nasty looking bruise," she said finally.

"Huh?"

"You're jaw," she explained, nodding to the large yellowy-green bruise that had risen when Kitty's stepdad had punched him.

"Oh," he said, fingering the tender area, "yeah, it's a bit painful."

"Kitty looks quite roughed up too," she noted, before giving him an accusatory look, "you two had a fight?"

"No!" he exclaimed, offended and shocked at once.

"No offence," she said mildly, looking across the room and giving a bright smile.

"You've run out of hot water," came Kitty's voice and Harry looked over his shoulder to see her walking in.

He had almost become used to seeing the cuts and bruises on Kitty's face after their disastrous first night of his disappearance, but seeing them with fresh eyes gave them a startling appearance. No wonder Donna was suspicious he realised, Kitty looked terrible and he guessed he wasn't exactly a picture at the moment.

"I was just commenting on you and Harry's matching mashed faces," said Donna and Kitty gave a slight laugh.

"We're going for the Bonnie and Clyde look," she snickered, sitting next to him and wrapping her hand in his.

"You're doing well," she noted, before giving a rueful smile, "I think Harry's a bit offended that I accused him of doing it."

"You're kidding right?" exclaimed Kitty before laughing loudly and looking at him, "He's the only reason I don't look like I've been attacked by a sledgehammer."

Harry flinched at her graphic choice of words.

"Who did it then?"

"My stepdad," she shrugged.

"What's he got to do with all this?"

"Well shortened story was, I moved in with him about six months ago and-"

"Are you fucking insane!" Donna practically yelled, "your stepdad? Your stepdad?"

"Yeah," waved Kitty dismissively, "bad mistake, I know. So, basically, he's a fucking retard and I tried to shoot him and Harry tried to beat him up and then knocked him out with a vodka bottle so now we are kind of on the run."

"Shoot..." asked Donna faintly, "you tried to...beat him up? And...vodka...what the hell..."

"Calm down," said Kitty stolidly, pulling out her cigarettes.

"You are fucking insane," she finally said after she'd finished gawping, before rounding on Harry, "and you! Encouraging her! Have you seen that guy?"

"Unfortunately," he said grimly and Donna couldn't help but laugh at this.

"Well well Caz," she said, shaking her head, looking disbelieving, "I knew you had a bit of a wild streak but I didn't put you down for murder."

"Attempted murder," corrected Kitty with a grin, "and anyway, it was self-defence! Manslaughter at the most."

Donna tried to give her a serious look but ended up dissolving in a fit of laughter. Kitty merely gave a placid smile and lit her cigarette as Harry watched the interchange blankly. He tried to imagine if he'd be so cool if Hermione or Ron came to him and told them his mum was dead and they'd tried to murder their dad. Somehow, he couldn't really see it panning out like this.

Suddenly, as Donna's laughter died away another noise filled the air and Kitty looked across to her wide eyed with disbelief.

“Oh shit, he’s woken up,” was all the girl said, jumping up and exiting the room.

Kitty twisted around in her seat and watched her leave open mouthed, before looking over to Harry, quite obviously speechless. In a matter of seconds the noise grew louder and Donna reappeared with its source, balanced on her hip.

“You have got to be shitting me!” yelled Kitty, practically vaulting over the couch to get a look at the young toddler that was bawling into Donna’s chest.

“Nope,” grinned Donna, “this is Jason, latest addition to the Grace clan.”

Kitty looked absolutely dumbstruck for a second and Harry couldn’t help but laugh at loud at this.

“That is got to be the first time I’ve ever seen you speechless,” he said and Donna cracked up with him.

“Ha ha,” she said sarcastically, before reaching over and shaking the little boys hand, “heya Jase.”

He continued to cry and Donna merely rolled her eyes and jogged him up and down for a bit as Kitty continued to stare.

“Where did he come from?” she asked finally, after trying a number of times to speak coherently.

“I’d have thought you’d have known that Caz,” laughed Donna.

“I mean...” she tried, before rocking back on her heels a bit, “shit, I don’t know what I mean! Shocking...who’s the dad, d’you know?”

“Oh, you’re gonna love this,” she grinned, “Mathew Jenson.”

“Mathew Jenson!” Kitty practically screeched, looking ever more dumbstruck now.

"Yeah yeah, I know," she sighed, rolling her eyes again, "I don't see him anymore so it's fine. Anyway, I reckon Greg'd probably kill him if I did."

"Greg would be...?" prompted Kitty.

"My new guy," she explained, nodding to a photo on the tv, "he's a work at the minute."

"I wondered why you'd moved," said Kitty, picking up the photo and looking at it interestedly.

"Mom wanted me to have my own freedom and a secure home for Jase, blah blah blah," she muttered, placing the baby, who'd now stopped crying, into a small cot that was tucked away before.

"So I get why you've left wherever it was you were staying," she said, glancing at Harry curiously for a second, "but I don't get why you're back here?"

"Fancied catching up with all my old friends," grinned Kitty and Harry looked at her quickly, she was lying.

"Funny, you not got a phone?" said Donna, slightly suspiciously, "it would have been nice to have rang me two years ago to tell me you were ok?"

"I wasn't, for a bit," she shrugged, walking and cooing at the baby as Harry stared at her, "did everything work out?"

"In the end," replied Donna cryptically and then slightly angrily said, "is that why you're back?"

"No. I'm here to see you," she replied steadily, "and then me and Harry are going to find somewhere to stay. I just wanted to check everything was ok."

Harry was completely nonplussed as to what the two girls were referring to, obviously something happened when Kitty was here last, something big that meant Donna had never even seen, or heard from

her since. And not only that, Donna seemed to have been left to sort it out and Harry could tell she didn't like it.

Donna was staring at Kitty thoughtfully, trying to make her mind up about something and he could tell this was where she either accepted Kitty was back or where a row was brewing.

"I've got a camp bed you can stay on," she said finally as Kitty broke into a wide smile, "and Harry can have the sofa. If you want."

"I knew you wouldn't let me down," Kitty cried happily, throwing her arms around the girl and giving her a long hug.

Donna merely gave a dry laugh and Harry felt a horrible unease settle in his stomach. Whereas Kitty was grinning widely, he could see Donna's smile didn't reach her eyes, which were murky with some concealed emotion he couldn't figure out.

Whatever had happened in the past, Donna hadn't forgiven Kitty and she didn't realise. He'd have to speak to her about it as soon as he could.

Harry washed his face and was just leaving the toilet when he heard his name being mentioned.

"So I get why you're here now, but what's with this Harry dude?"

Kitty gave a laugh and Harry frowned, finding himself rooted to the spot in the hallway.

"What's that mean?" asked Donna, obviously a smile on her face.

"Nothing," said Kitty, trying to brush off the conversation, "got anymore?"

"Try under the sink," she said, before persisting, "no come on Caz. I don't see you for two years and then here you are with some strange guy on my floor and I'm not supposed to ask anything about him?"

"I never stopped you from asking anything," said Kitty simply.



"Alright then, tell me the story," she said and Harry heard the sound of two glasses being poured out, "who is he?"

"I don't know," she replied.

Harry felt his mouth drop open at this and he stared at the wall - what kind of a reply was that?

"You don't know," repeated Donna in a disbelieving tone, "what's that supposed to mean - you just found him on the street?"

"Bus actually," she said with a laugh, "but seriously? I went to school with him, primary."

"So, he's just an old school friend you've hooked up with?"

"Not exactly, I never actually knew him at school," she said, "he was the weird guy at the back of the class y'know?"

"Doesn't sound like your type," said Donna, sounding almost suspicious.

"What is my type?" demanded Kitty.

"Twats like Steven Jacobs," she replied and they both began to laugh.

Harry frowned even more, hating himself for eavesdropping but unable to tear himself away, if he was truly honest to himself, he hadn't figured out why Kitty liked him.

"Maybe I've changed," Kitty was saying.

"Spots and leopards man, spots and leopards," replied Donna wisely.

"Shut up!" said Kitty indignantly.

"So why Harry then?"

Harry edged forward, standing just beside the doorway to the room now, he wasn't even aware that he'd been moving forwards all the

time. Meanwhile in the living room there was a long silence, and Harry could feel a nauseous sensation developing in his stomach.

“What’s up?” asked Donna, in a little lower voice, “Come on, why’s he so special?”

Harry desperately wished he could see what Kitty looked like right now, the silence and the suspense was killing him.

“Caz?”

“Because he is ok?” she snapped suddenly.

Harry was taken aback, feeling himself shocked for some reason, which seemed to be how Donna was feeling because there was another long silence.

“What’s going on?” she said finally, in a quiet, serious voice.

“Harry...” began Kitty, before pausing suddenly.

“Don’t worry, he went to bed ages ago,” said Donna quickly, “Harry’s what?”

“Harry’s complicated,” she said finally.

He wondered if he was, before realising that yes, she was definitely more right than she’d ever know.

“Why?”

“Because...” she mused thoughtfully, “because he’s different. He’s the first person I’ve met that doesn’t look at me and think tart or slapper or see some useless school dropout. Or at least, I don’t think he does.”

“Hey man, people don’t think that,” said Donna firmly.

"Yeah whatever," she muttered and Harry stared at the wall, fascinated by what she was saying, "I just don't have a clue what he sees when he looks at me, you know? What he actually sees?"

"He sees you, of course," she said, taking Kitty's words literally.

"No, not sees...but really sees?" she said, before giving a frustrated sigh as she realised she was making no sense, "he doesn't see tart, or some stupid dropout, then what does he see?"

"There's more to you than that beneath it all," said Donna.

Harry didn't think this sounded particularly comforting.

"So...what..." she tried, before giving a thoughtful sigh, "why is he here then, with you?"

"Because I'm scared of what my stepdad'd do if he found him, or my brothers if they got wind," she said and Harry's mouth practically dropped open, brothers?

"But I don't know, he was the one running away, and when I met him...I don't know, I just think he needs someone around y'know, someone who understands?"

"Understands what?"

"I don't know," she said, sounding suddenly thoughtful, "but whatever it is, we understand one another. He did about my mom and dad, never said a word against it...and I think I understand what's going on with him..."

"What is going on with him then?" demanded Donna, "I know you can be persuasive, and that your stepdad can be terrifying, but why's he here? What's he got to run away from?"

"Listen," she began in a low voice Harry had to strain to hear, "he was living with his Aunt and Uncle right? And they are the biggest pair of...I can't even describe what they're like! Snobbish suburban types with a company car and box-hedges..."

“Doesn’t sound that bad,” said Donna, sounding almost wistful, “all that money...”

“No! No it’s not nice! They hated him and were taking it out on him so much, getting to him, you know what its like...breaking your spirit.”

“You and your broken spirit!” exclaimed Donna, “you think just because you’ve had a shit life everyone else has! He’s probably just some rich kid wanting a holiday and a quick shag-”

“Fuck you!” exclaimed Kitty suddenly, sounding angry, “you don’t know what you’re talking about, ok?”

“Ok, sorry,” Donna said, sounding apologetic yet annoyed, “just stating an opinion...”

“Well don’t,” she snapped.

“Well, what do you think the reason is then?”

“I just told you I don’t know,” said Kitty in a tone Harry immediately recognised as her sarcastic, pissed-off voice.

Harry listened to Donna apologising, not really hearing what she was saying. He was too busy thinking of what Kitty had said, of how she was talking about him and it made him strangely...happy.

She was defending him, when she really didn’t have any reason to, he’d been so secretive, hadn’t told her anything, and yet she understood...In a way he felt that she understood more than anyone else ever could – was that even possible, he asked himself, when she knew nothing she seemed to know everything?

His head almost ached with the whirlwind of thoughts and it was only the mention of his name again that caught his attention. Donna had asked something he hadn’t heard and Kitty’s reply told him she’d calmed down since earlier.

"You're a lot different to the last time I spoke to you, still pissy and bitchy," she said affectionately, "but different...you really like him huh?"

Harry, as suddenly panicked as he was by their conversation, couldn't help but lean forward curiously, not wanting to miss her reply. Kitty however had been silent for some time and his heart actually felt like it was going to burst out of chest with the suspense.

"Oh my god," said Donna suddenly, as if something suddenly dawned on her, "do you...love him?"

"Donna," scoffed Kitty, causing Harry to frown, noticing she had completely avoided the question, as did Donna it seemed.

"That's not an answer!" the girl said excitably, "Do you? It would explain a lot of things."

"Well, I don't know," brushed off Kitty, the beginnings of a snap in her tone, "how am I supposed to know what that feels like?"

"You just do," said Donna firmly, "it feels like it's meant to be."

"Don't give me all that Romeo and Juliet crap," she said bluntly, "you do realise none of that stuffs real?"

Harry stared at the wall intently, not quite sure how he felt right at the moment, anger, sadness, confusion all milling around his head until he couldn't think straight.

"And don't you give me any of that 'look at me, I'm a hard nut' crap either," countered Donna, "if you like him, why can't you just say it? What are you afraid of?"

"I'm not afraid of anything," said Kitty waspishly, sounding peeved, "I'm just saying, I don't know if I'm in love because I haven't got anything to compare it to, and even if I did I wouldn't say because what's the point anyway? Its not going to last, everybody disappears in the end."

Harry was taken aback at the bitterness in her voice and he wondered if she truly believed it.

“And anyway, Harry’ll be gone soon enough anyway, once he realises what I’m really like,” she added in a dull, resigned voice, “I can’t even figure out why he likes me...”

“He likes you because he can see through your little personality barrier you put up, just like I always could,” she said affectionately, and Kitty gave a laugh.

“I don’t do that.”

“Course you do, you always have. Caz here, Cathy there – I heard him calling you Kitty, that’s a new one,” she said pointedly.

There was a silence before they both suddenly burst out laughing.

“Well you can shrug all you want,” sniggered Donna, “but you don’t have to worry about him ditching you, I’d more think it’d be the other way around.”

“Well that’s not going to happen,” said Kitty, laughter dying away as Harry couldn’t help but grin to himself, “he’s wicked company, when he’s not being quiet or secretive...”

“Quiet?”

“Well, depressed is probably the better word,” she admitted, sounding slightly sad now, “I think he’s a bit of a dark thinker...but when he’s happy and not thinking about stuff, he is so funny! All he has to do is look at me and I start laughing! Really dry sense of humour you know, and sometimes-”

“Ok, you’re rambling,” cut in Donna suddenly and Kitty shut up instantly as she laughed.

“I know, sorry...” she said, “I just wish he’d be a little happier sometimes, lighten up a bit – he acts like he’s got the weight of the world on his shoulders.”

Harry almost laughed out loud when she said this, mind rushing back to the thought of the Prophecy.

“Maybe he will,” said Donna finally, “maybe you could give him a reason to be happier.”

“Yeah well, he seems almost scared to kiss me any longer than a few seconds. I think he must be expecting me to suddenly realise I don’t like him anymore and karate chop his arse or something. I don’t know, sometimes life would be a lot simpler if you could say, yes I like you, and yes, lets have some fun.”

“I’m sure he’ll realise that soon enough,” giggled Donna, “you’re not exactly miss tactful are you?”

“Hey, I resent that comment,” she said in mock-hurt, “I’m just trying to be straight with you.”

“And I appreciate that, I really do,” said Donna.

“Yeah whatever,” said Kitty, before there was the sounding of a glass being put down on the table in a resolute manner, “ok, I’m off to the toilet, down the corridor yeah?”

Harry gave a massive start.

“Yeah, all the way down,” said Donna.

He darted down the corridor himself, trying to make as little noise as possible whilst simultaneously trying to run as fast as he could, in the dark, with obstacles. He finally made it to the spare room and closed the door quickly, leaning against it and breathing deeply. His eyes slowly readjusted to the dark and he located his sleeping bag, sitting down on it with a thump, but not getting in.

He was thinking about everything he’d overheard, trying to take it all in. Her suspicions over him, what she’d told Donna about his past, her feelings for him, there was too many things to think about. What his mind kept repeating though was the last part of the conversation,

the part about him not having enough fun, because she was right. He was away from the magical world now, he didn't have to think about all this rubbish anymore – why couldn't he just have fun? He nodded to himself resolutely, time to start enjoying life, from tomorrow morning he decided he would not dwell on the past anymore.

Why wait till the tomorrow a little voice in his head whispered, you're sitting here in the dark thinking, like you know you shouldn't, when they're out there drinking and having fun! Well, if they could, so could he.

Kitty unscrewed the cap of the bottle off, laughing along to Donna's story, it felt good to talk to someone about everything, stuff she'd kept bottled up from everyone, even Harry. Now she could get some kind of idea about what was going on, it felt like it was all somehow much more real now.

"So anyway, I was running and tripping at the same time, this huge roll of barbed wire tangled around my legs right?" giggled Donna, unable to speak through her own laughter, "and it took me so long to fall, and just when I-"

Here she paused and Kitty looked up to her expectantly.

"Heya Harry," she said, giving a slight wave.

Kitty twisted around in her seat to see Harry standing in the doorway dressed in old jeans and a baggy tee shirt and sporting the most out of control hair she'd ever seen on a person.

"Sorry – did we wake you up?" she asked, flashing an apologetic smile.

"Nah, couldn't sleep," he said, wandering into the lounge, "do you mind if I join you?"

"Hell no," she laughed, sliding along the sofa so he could sit by her.

She gave him a happy grin and turned back to Donna as if surprised.

"Do you want a drink Harry?" asked Donna getting up expectantly.



"I'd recommended the wod-ka," said Kitty, nudging him and raising her glass with a cheer.

"Wod-ka?" he asked her with a raised eyebrow.

"No Wod-ka," she repeated in a thick Russian accent.

"Just humour her," sighed Donna, shaking her head in mock-pity, "it makes her happy. Vodka coke yeah Harry?"

"Whatever," he said before grinning at Kitty, "feeling happy?"

"Surprising mellow," she said in another strange accent that he couldn't pin.

"You sound like..." he began, searching for the right word.

"An idiot?" asked Donna, handing him a high glass.

Kitty merely bobbed her tongue out at her and kicked her shins.

"Ouch – yeah I remember them boots now," she laughed, rubbing her leg before her ears pricked up, "him again?"

Harry heard baby Jason's cry's dimly and they watched as Donna gathered a bottle from the kitchen and headed out quickly. Kitty watched her go and Harry picked up his glass, giving it an experimental sniff. It smelled very strong. She picked up her own glass and held it up.

"To...?" she asked, waiting for him to continue.

"To..." Harry said thoughtfully, before giving a grin, "to new beginnings?"

"I'll drink to that," she said, before knocking back her drink.

Harry took a swig of his, feeling the burning liquid slide down his throat. He was surprised at how strong it was and for a second his

throat didn't seem to want to accept it at all. He gave a grimace and looked over to Kitty, who had downed hers and was now pulling a face like she'd sucked a sour lemon.

"Bleugh, yuck, yuck!" she said happily, before looking over to him, "again?"

"Hang on," he laughed, before drinking the rest of his.

He put his glass down and she pulled up a bottle of clear liquid that he eyed suspiciously. She measured out a clear inch in the bottom of both their glasses and picked it up.

"Down in one?" she asked, eyebrows raised.

"Down in one," he agreed, grinning widely.

This was repeated three times, in which time Harry had discovered their game was in fact, hysterically funny. Donna was still quelling the screaming baby and Harry put his glass down a little heavier than he thought he was going to and Kitty was still laughing.

"Ok – ok – breatheeeeeee," she said, a few giggles bubbling up as she picked up the bottle.

She made a big show of unscrewing the cap and squinted with one eye as she poured out another shot.

"Ok!" she said extravagantly, brandishing her glass, "to...MacDonalds!"

"MacDonalds!" Harry agreed exuberantly, clinking glasses and knocking it back.

They both made sour faces, saw each others reactions, and began to laugh hysterically.

"You – you're...Drunk!" she proclaimed ecstatically, prodding his chest.

"I am so not!" he countered wildly.

"You're speaking like me!" she pointing out, before cracking up and added in a posh voice, "that's not your accent Harold!"

"Oh I'm sorry darling," Harry apologised in his finest queens English, "do forgive my impertinent manners!"

Kitty looked at him in blank surprise for a moment before they both burst out into loud, raucous laughter.

Half an hour later, Donna emerged into the living room, having finally got Jason back to sleep to find the two sprawled out on the sofa, both trying to speak to each other at the same time, in very loud voices, words lost in the laughter.

"How is it possible to get so drunk in such a small amount of time?" she asked in puzzlement as she walked in.

"We're out of wodka," said Harry by-ways of explanation as Kitty held up the bottle proudly.

"I forgot how much you knocked back," she muttered, traipsing over to a cupboard and pulling out a second bottle, "I knew you'd drink me out of house and home,"

"Only house," countered Kitty with a wide grin, "join us..."

"You make it sound so ominous," laughed Donna, flopping into the sofa.

She watched Kitty pouring a glass out for her, smirking as she had to squint with one eye closed as the stream of liquid wandered across the rim of the glass.

She spent only about half an hour with the two in the end. They were both far more intoxicated than her and after a while she lost sense in their mad conversation. She settled for sitting back and studying them, amazed almost. Kitty may have said he was quiet and shy but when he was drunk, boy could Harry chat. She could instantly recognise

the way he was bantering though, he sounded exactly like Kitty – that’s what used to amaze her, how her accent and her style of speaking seemed to rub off on anyone who spent more than 10 minutes with her.

She grinned at the two of them, sharing their private joke and she noticed that Kitty had her hand laced with his, resting on her lap. Smiling slightly, she watched him toying with one of her braids as they spoke and decided she ought to get an early night. Getting up she took her glass into the kitchen, washed it and wandered back in to see them still in deep, occasionally humorous, conversation.

“Night guys,” said Donna, wandering to the door.

“You going to bed already?” asked Kitty, managing to drag her eyes away from Harry.

“Yeah, tired and have an early morning tomorrow,” she explained, “mom’ll be around to pick up Jase before I go so the place is yours until I get back at 5, ok?”

“Ok, right,” said Kitty, “nighttttttty night!”

“Yes, goodnight dear,” added Harry in a peculiarly posh voice.

Donna looked at him oddly before shrugging and waving them goodnight. She went into the bathroom and got ready for bed before deciding to fetch a glass of water. She was halfway to the door when she caught sight of Harry and Kitty, who were in the middle of a pretty personal moment and she decided against it, wandering off to bed.

For once, she remarked as she pulled her quilts around her and watched Jason sleeping, she thought that Kitty might actually be happy, then wondered how that made her feel.

“We must make food!” Kitty yelled suddenly, clambering to her feet.

“Food? Here?” Harry asked, also hoisting himself to his feet, “Won’t you melt or explode or something if you don’t eat MacDonalds?”

“Ha ha Harold!” she laughed, attempting to shove him over but missing spectacularly, “But no - I also eat peanut butter...”

“Peanut butter?” he asked dubiously, trailing after her as she lurched towards the kitchen.

“Peanut butter and marmite sandwiches to be precise!” she exclaimed extravagantly, throwing open a cupboard door.

Harry, who felt like his contacts must have fallen out because his vision was all fuzzy, tried to focus on one of the three Kitty’s who was scaling the cupboards in search of jars. He gave a laugh, stumbling backwards until he leant against the relatively firm safety of the counter, trying to chase his vision into fixing on one point.

“Do this look like-” she began, twisting to show him a jar before she gave a yelp and fell off the counter to the floor with a crash.

“Kitty!” he began laughing hysterically, stumbling over to her in time to see her doubling up with laughter.

“Ow - ow - Harry, I think I broke something!” she exclaimed, trying to push herself up, “Eugh.”

She held up a hand that was covered in brown paste and small pieces of peanuts and began to laugh even more.

“You’re so foolish,” he told her, dropping to his knees and looking at the sad remains of Donna’s peanut butter.

“At least I’m a clean fool,” she retorted.

“Wha-”

Kitty lurched forward suddenly and smushed her peanut covered hands into his face, causing him to yell out and fall backwards, cursing and laughing simultaneously.

“You are so sneaky,” he said indignantly, trying to wipe the mass of gloop off his cheeks and out of his eyes .

“And cunning,” she reminded him, superior glint in her eyes.

“Not too smart though,” he laughed, lurching forward himself, trying to smear it back onto her face.

And thus ensued a hilarious and surprising long game of throwing peanut butter at each other as the slipped and slid across the lino floor, occasionally falling over or banging into each other. Eventually they were left in a soggy pile on the floor, both leaning against the cupboard and trying to breath deeply.

“I feel really weird,” Harry laughed finally, trying to pull a particularly stubborn lump of crunchy peanut from his hair.

“Sort of sticky?” she asked him, picking up the smashed jar and studying it intently.

“And smelly too,” he added, unable to stop himself laughing again, “and hungry, where’s my sandwiches!”

Kitty crawled across the floor, picked up a loaf of bread and retreated over to him. She handed him a slice of bread and smeared the marmite off her fingers onto her own.

“You’re a self-service buffet,” she sniggered to herself.

“You can’t eat off yourself!” said Harry, watching in amazement as she did just that.

“Why not?” she asked him simply.

“Because...” he began, trying to think of a good reason, “because it’s dirty...”

“You calling me dirty?” she asked in mock-irritation, before licking her fingers.

He shook his head, finding his vision swimming and the weird feeling increasing.

"Tastes better like this," she mused and Harry looked at his own marmite covered fingers.

He gave a shrug and licked one, agreeing after a few moments she was right and enjoying the next few minutes in contented silence as they ate, self-service style.

"Now, drink?" she asked finally.

"Eugh," Harry said, shaking his head, "no more...my head hurts."

"Water then," she said, stumbling to her feet and grabbing some glasses and handing one to him.

They both sat down on the kitchen floor and began to drink the water in silence.

"If Hermione could see me now she'd go mental," Harry laughed suddenly, turning to Kitty with a goofy smile on his face, "I don't reckon she'd approve of me drinking."

"Who's Hermione?" asked Kitty suspiciously, frowning at Harry.

"She's a witch," he snickered, personally congratulating himself on his private joke.

"What the hell are you talking about?" she asked, sounding irritated, but grinning widely, "who's Hermione."

"She's my friend, from school," he told her, still laughing to himself, "and Ron...my best friends."

"Really?" she asked, absentmindedly licking some more marmite off her fingers, "what's she like?"

"Who?"

"Hermione..." prompted Kitty, turning to face Harry now.

"She's...smart," began Harry thoughtfully, the thought suddenly occurring to him that he should be getting his OWLS results soon.

"She's smart?" repeated Kitty, looking slightly put-out, "What does she look like?"

"She has big hair," nodded Harry, "and she used to have really big front teeth, but she shrunk them."

"What?"

"Her parents are dentists," added Harry as a side note and Kitty nodded slowly.

"Have you ever kissed her?" she asked.

Harry couldn't help it, the question, mixed with the tone of voice Kitty said it in was enough to make him double over with wild laughter. Far from imagining what Ron's reaction would have been, Harry was picturing what Hermione would have done to him if he tried it on with her. Which he definitely didn't want to do.

"Stop laughing at me," she said irritably, smacking Harry on the arm.

He just continued to laugh even harder now when he realised why Kitty was suddenly acting so strange.

"Are you jealous?" he teased incredulously.

"What of? Miss I'm-so-smart, I'm-so-posh, Hermione?" she sneered, completely oblivious to how she sounded, "What kind of name is that anyway?"

"It's Greek, or something, I don't know," shrugged Harry.

"Kitty's Greek," she pointed out, not to be outdone, "means little cat."

"I'd never have guessed," said Harry dryly, "and anyway, you're name isn't Kitty, it's Catherine."



“Not to you,” she said firmly, “I hate the name Catherine, who wants their name to mean ‘pure’?”

“I like it,” said Harry thoughtfully, “why do you have to keep giving yourselves different names?”

Kitty shrugged and they lapsed into silence. Harry got the feeling he was in trouble for something, but couldn’t really place his finger on what he could possibly have done wrong.

“Did you tell her about me?”

Oh right, that’s what it was, he’d mentioned Hermione.

“No,” he admitted, taking a big gulp of water as she looked at him swiftly.

“Why not?” she exclaimed loudly.

“Because,” he said, shrugging, “I didn’t really feel like speaking to them lately, about anything.”

Kitty’s features softened slightly at this and Harry suddenly felt that drinking so much wasn’t a good idea, he felt too out of control at the moment, that he would just blurt something dangerous out at any second and not be able to stop himself. But it was more than that, maybe it was the drink but he felt the familiar black cloud creeping over him, remembering why it was he ran away, Quibell’s letter, Sirius, the veil...How could he be sat here drinking and having fun when so much had gone bad...

“You didn’t tell them you were leaving,” she said slowly, “did you?”

Harry shook his head wordlessly.

“They’ll know by now,” she told him, as if testing his reactions.

“I guess.”

Harry felt slightly sick now, as if all the fun had been drained away, as if all the pain had been let back in. What was he doing sitting here anyway? Proving to Kitty he could be fun, just because he'd overheard some stupid conversation between her and Donna? Well newsflash Harry, he chided himself, things aren't fun, what you're doing isn't fun, you're hurting people - still. Fun isn't something he should have been feeling right now.

"Harry?" asked Kitty, a long way off now.

"I might go and sleep now..." Harry said thoughtfully, clambering to his feet and already weaving towards the door.

"What? Right...ok," said Kitty, sounding confused, "erm, if you're sure?"

Kitty followed him into the darkened lounge.

"Night," he said, picking the longest sofa and falling into it heavily.

"Night then Harry," she said, standing next to the sofa for a few moments longer than was necessary.

Kitty walked out of the room and Harry buried his face into the pillow. His thoughts were all muddled up now, it was hard to keep track of one thought for more than a few seconds, but all he was sure of was that they were prodding at the idea of magic, of Ron, Hermione, Dumbledore, Sirius...there wasn't enough room for everything.

He wished he had Dumbledore's pensieve.

Remus knocked on the door to Mrs Figg's house, waiting patiently as the scuffling sounds approached the door.

"Who's there?" she called out in a well rehearsed way.

"Morton the Magnificent," sighed Remus heavily.

Honestly, what a stupid password.

"And who is accompanying Morton?"

She sounded like she had the words printed on a card in front of her.

“Remus Lupin.”

“And what brings you to my abode?”

“Arabella,” he said wearily, “can you just open up, you know it’s me-”

“Mr Lupin, try and have a little care for the rules!” she said, before patiently reeling off her question once again.

“I’m here to meet Cassandra, as are the last few people who came to the door.”

Finally a chain was slid back and the door was opened to reveal a grumpy looking old woman, floral dress highlighted and accentuated by the large wizards hat she had perched on top of her rollers.

“You could be any such Death Eater acting like that,” she cautioned him and he entered the small house, “and you’re late.”

“Sorry,” he apologised, “is Dumbledore here yet?”

“Yes, he’s in the living room with everyone,” she told him, before adding accusingly, “we’ve all be waiting for you.”

He entered the room to find Moody, Tonks and Kingsley sat in various chintzy armchairs, either avoiding the cats or politely not eating the strangely green cake they’d been handed. Moody looked most out of place surrounded by the knitted pink blankets and doyleys and gave Remus a silent nod of the head as he entered, followed by a dirty look towards the last occupier of the room; Cassandra.

The tall, thin woman was sat neatly on the sofa next to Tonks, who’d managed to sprawl out and tuck her legs underneath her as she chatted to the woman. They were old friends, although they looked completely different, Cassandra with her long, white fingers clasped

together on her lap, spectacles perched on her thin nose as she listened intently to Tonks.

As he walked in she looked up suddenly and he gave her a smile but chose the seat furthest away. Cassandra, for all her help, unnerved him greatly, something which Tonks had always found highly amusing.

"Ah Remus," she said, grey eyes staring into him, "I haven't seen you on my last few forays into the world of magic?"

"I've been...busy," he said quickly, not failing to see Tonks trying to suppress a smile.

"Of course," she said, taking off her spectacles and wiping them on a small, green cloth, "how have you been?"

"Fine," he said, noting the woman's usual, precise way of doing everything.

"I can see that," she nodded ominously, "strange times, are they not?"

She sounded as if she were commenting in an offhanded way about the weather, but he knew Cassandra too well, she was always so...meticulous. What did she mean about 'strange times'? What could that be a reference to? It always put him on guard talking to her, thinking that at any time he could slip up...

She was still awaiting an answer.

He gave an awkward nod of acknowledgement and she gave a thin-lipped, satisfied looking smile before turning back to Tonks, who had suddenly acquired a strange cough that sounded suspiciously like laughter.

"So, we're all here now," said Kingsley, putting down his cake gratefully, "shall we get started?"

Everyone nodded and Cassandra carefully opened the file she'd been resting on her knees, flicking across a few pages as if absorbing them into her memory.

"Tonks has been filling me in on as much detail as she could, and I've been studying all your files on this case for a few hours now. I think I've got some insights that may interest you," she said, flashing them all an individual, penetrating look, "this is a more common case than I think you'd believe."

Out of the corner of his eye Remus saw Kingsley roll his eyes towards Moody, who gave a grimace-like smile of appreciation.

"Now from what I can see, both Harry and Cathy have been deprived of loving, caring environments," she told them seriously, as if she hadn't noticed, "Harry because he was forced to grow up as an outsider in not only his home but in his social life, in Cathy's case the separation of her parents, their equally violent personalities and her mother's subsequent depression and death. We are not talking happy childhoods here - they are both striving to seek out what they have lost. They both have a deep seated need to feel loved for who they perceive themselves to be, not what label they have been given in life."

"With Harry he's found a muggle with no knowledge of the magical world, no idea who the Boy-Who-Lived is, someone whom he can share a connection with for no other reason than him being himself. Cathy is much more complex, a child that suffers from abuse for any sustained period of time develops deep physiological scars and as such leads to a very unpredictable nature. It is my guess that she sees Harry as some kind of saviour, meaning that he has arrived out of nowhere and he has been able to offer her a way out, an escape from the pain."

"So are you saying that they're both using each other?" asked Remus slowly, "That Harry needed somebody to love him for who he was, take away the pain and the guilt and chanced upon her, and that Cathy needed someone to help her get out and found Harry?"

"No, not at all," she said, dropping her spectacles around her neck, "I believe that they both may indeed have deep feelings for each other. You see, as I was saying earlier, those that are deprived of love throughout their lives are often those that feel love the strongest. They are more willing for a relationship to develop faster or deeper as they search for acceptance - it is an amazing coincidence that Harry and Cathy have both met each other in the exact moment in their lives when they needed each other most. Harry's loss of his Godfather and the burden of Voldemort's War and Cathy's abusive father and failing academic and social life mean they have both come to major turning points in their lives, in Harry's case this situation will be detrimental to him, being brought back to the magical world, away from Cathy and back to reality will be one of the hardest things he's going to have to do. Cathy on the other hand benefits from the situation, she has escaped from her father, she seems to be resourceful and streetwise enough to survive on her own."

"When you say detrimental..." prompted Remus, looking slightly worried.

"What I mean is, Harry believes he had very good reasons to run away, I'm sure he was thinking this before he even met Cathy, but she gave him the confidence, the belief that he could actually do it. From what you and the other Order members have told me of your meeting with him running up to his disappearance, Harry has been very angry. Underneath all the pain and grief and guilt of Sirius' death lies anger I believe, towards Voldemort and his Death Eaters for sure, but also towards the Order, specifically Dumbledore for the burden that has been placed upon his shoulders. This might act as some sort of channel for him, somewhere where he can focus all the emotion, making it possible for him to rationalise leaving. You explained about his best friends, they seem to be remarkably close, yet this does not seemed to have stopped him in his decision."

"I know, I just don't understand it," Remus sighed wearily, "what does he think he's doing? He must know it madness?"

"It may be hard for you to accept right now, but Harry might not be the most balanced of people. He's had a rough few years by all

account and this sort of serious, irrational behaviour is quite often seen in cases where people have lost touch with reality as it were."

"You reckon he's gone barmy?" asked Moody gruffly.

"No, not barmy," she said sharply, as if offended by the word, "I'm merely suggesting that you entertain the fact that Harry is not in a stable frame of mind right now. He has run away, risking his life, Cathy's life, his friendships back here, even though in his heart I believe Harry already knows he cannot run forever, that it will probably be a matter of days before he is found. But he would never stop and wait to be found, that I can be sure of, he will keep running until he's trapped completely. At this point he would rather die than give up and return - partly because of the reaction he fears from his friends and partly because this means he will be parted from Cathy."

"How serious do you think they are about each other?" he asked her.

"I'm sure Harry and Cathy think they're as serious as you can get," she said with a sad smile, "he's probably even considered telling her about the magical world and himself - testing her to see how strong they're love is. But he will never tell her, not only from fear of being rejected, a loss he would never cope with, but also because he fears this will bring her closer to danger."

"But he's in danger now! They both are!" he said incredulously, "away from the Orders protection, unarmed..."

"On the other hand he's untraceable, he's sunk into the shadows and you can't find him. Before everyone knew where Harry would be, with his family or with the Weasley's, now, well now no one knows," said Cassandra thoughtfully, "in a way he's much safer than he ever was before, he's become muggle - slipped into the masses, become invisible."

"And what if they find a way to get to him before we do?" asked Kingsley, "he's going to be pretty safe then."

“Well that, as they say, is where the psychology stops and the magic begins,” said Cassandra with a small laugh, “I’m only muggle after all.”

Everyone sensed that this comment was in direct retaliation to their feelings against her and her profession. Remus looked over to Tonks, who was twiddling her thumbs and looking at the ceiling, yes, she’d definitely told her what they’d said.

“You don’t have any clue where they’d go?” asked Moody, completely missing the woman’s hint and putting a slight sneer in his tone.

Cassandra flashed him a quick look that said she knew everything she needed to know about his own personality and was feeling quite smug about it.

“It’s possible that where they go will be entirely dependant on Cathy,” she said, placing all her files she’d been given into a tidy pile in front of her, “Harry has no real family or friends to speak of in the muggle world whereas I’m sure a girl like her has numerous friends dotted about. I’d start by looking into that.”

“Thank you Cassandra,” said Remus warmly, reaching out and shaking her hand, “you’ve been a real help.”

“You sound surprised,” she said dryly, but gave him a comforting smile.

After handshakes were exchanged she handed all her notes back to Moody and looked at him expectantly.

“I suppose it’s that time again?” she asked, looking calm and collected.

“Sorry,” apologised Tonks, “I wish we didn’t have to...”

“I understand completely,” she said with a mild smile, “fire away.”

“Obliviate,” muttered Moody and everyone waited for the result.



After the dazed expression left her eyes, Cassandra shook her head slightly and took off her glasses, polishing them on a small yellow cloth. When she put them back onto her nose she gave them another easy-going smile.

"I hope I was of help," she said.

"Of course, as always," nodded Remus.

"More than I'll ever know I guess," she joked, climbing to her feet, "no no, don't get up on my account, I can find the door myself. Speak to you in the future no doubt."

"Yeah, bye Cass," waved Tonks as they all said their goodbyes.

When the door closed shut everyone turned back to each other and gave an uncomfortable look.

"I hate having to do that," complained Tonks, "it makes us seem so ungrateful..."

"It's for the best," said Moody sharply, trying to pull them all out of the uneasiness, "it's her job and she's winding you up, she knows you feel guilty about it. Lets concentrate on what she told us – where they're going."

"Wolverhampton, no doubt about it," said Tonks and everyone nodded in agreement.

"So, what's the next step?"

"We go to Wolverhampton," said Remus.

She realised she couldn't fight the thirst any longer and sat up in bed, looking around the room, Donna was fast asleep on the bed and the cot next to it was for once, completely silent. Rubbing her face groggily she fought to extricate herself from her sleeping bag, climbing to her feet and tottering towards the door as stealthily as possible.

The flat was completely silent save for the hum of the fridge in the kitchen and even the usual sounds of the busy building were muted. She guessed it must have been very early in the morning, the sun wasn't up yet however and she stumbled through the dark trying to remember how the passages worked in this building. She found if she let her feet do the walking and disconnected her brain it all came flooding back, she'd lived here for nearly 3 months, a record for her and her mother, and all the flats were laid out exactly the same. She found herself in the bathroom, and was just bending her head beneath the sink tap to get a drink when she heard a dull thump outside.

She straightened up instantly, heart hammering to life as she looked behind her. There was no one in the room that she could see and she exhaled shakily, she was just being paranoid...

Her lips had almost touched the trickle of water when she heard a second, louder thump. This time she abandoned the sink and poked her head around the bathroom door, staring into the black corridor.

"Harry?" she whispered as loudly as she dared.

There was nothing but silence for a few moments, then another sound reached her ears. Frowning slightly she tiptoed down the corridor, running her hand along the wall until she found the doorway into the lounge. She could hear it more distinctly now, it sounded like someone muttering quietly and she frowned even deeper - who was he talking to?

There was another thump and after a moments indecision she moved into the lounge, squinting at the sofa she knew Harry was sleeping on.

"Who are you talking to?" she asked in a quiet voice.

"No...don't go in there..." she heard Harry mumble, "please...don't..."

Kitty stared at Harry - he was dreaming? What about? At least she'd located the noise; he kept tossing and turning beneath the blankets.

"I'm so sorry..."

Kitty was taken aback, Harry sounded almost heartbroken as he said this and she knelt down on the floor next to him unsure whether to wake him up or leave him be.

“Don’t...”

“Harry,” she said tentatively, reached out to shake him gently by the shoulders.

However, she soon drew her hand back, surprised yet dismayed to see he was absolutely drenched in sweat.

“Hey Harry, wake up now...” she said a little more loudly and the panic filled mutterings got louder, “Harry? Can you hear me?”

It didn’t work, he didn’t even seem to be aware of her presence and she tried to shake him again. However, she suddenly jumped back in shock before she could stop herself when he gave a huge gasp, back arching up as if he were in pain as he thrashed the blankets off him.

“Harry!” she said shakily when she’d recovered, shaking him roughly by the shoulders now.

“Sirius!” he gasped, arms flailing out now, “Don’t! Please don’t!”

She didn’t know what to do, he wouldn’t wake up and it sounded like whatever he was dreaming about was getting worse and she hadn’t failed to notice the name.

“Wake up now, goddammit!” she said fiercely, trying push his arms down.

She couldn’t make out the words he was muttering now, despite the fact they were getting louder and more desperate and Kitty could hardly bear to listen to him, it sounded like someone was dying...It occurred to her suddenly that maybe someone was, that Harry was seeing the moment when this person, Sirius or whoever he was, died.

“I’m so sorry...it’s all my fault Sirius,” he mumbled, as his hands curled around her arm desperately, “please...I wanted to save you...not kill you...I killed you...I killed you...”

Kitty stared at him, gobsmacked for a moment as he continually repeated this line, legs and arms thrashing as if he were fighting to break loose from someone. His fingernails were digging painfully into her arms now and with a sudden yell he pitched off the sofa, falling onto the floor in a tangled mess.

She shuffled backwards to see him pressing the palm of his hand to his forehead, chest heaving and he fought to drag air into his lungs. He looked as if he had no idea where he was, nor cared, lying on the floor in the exact same position as he fell.

“Harry?” she asked, shuffling forwards slightly.

He didn’t seem to hear her still and the room stayed silent, save for his desperate attempts to slow his breathing.

“Are you okay now?” she asked, laying a hand on his shoulder.

Two things happened at this point almost instantly; Harry gave a surprised yell, scrambling up hastily and Kitty was knocked backwards, giving her own yelp as an inexplicable, massive electric shock chased up her arm.

“K-Kitty,” he gasped, face still gleaming with sweat, “w-what are you doing here?”

He sounded almost terrified and she stared at him in confusion for a few moments, rubbing her tingling hand slightly.

“Harry...” she began, suddenly not knowing what to say, “I was just in the bathroom and I heard you...”

What should she say? Tell him she’d heard his mutterings, seen him having a nightmare?

“...heard you fall about of bed,” she finished finally, “are you okay?”

"Fine," he said stoically, turning away from her.

She could see his throat working as if he were trying to stop himself being sick and his hands were shaking terribly - whatever it was, this was affecting him worse than she thought he could cope with.

"I'll er, I just make us a drink..." she said worriedly, rising to her feet.

He nodded mutely and she hurried away into the kitchen. She fumbled around in the dark until she located a glass and held it under the tap, noting with slight shock that her own hands were shaking as if she was on the receiving end of a particularly violent nightmare. She turned to leave the kitchen, but found her legs firmly locked into position - why was she so upset, so scared...She glanced down at her fingers, which were still tingling slightly and she looked back through the doors to see Harry's hunched back.

Gulping back her anxiety she quickly walked back into the living room, finding Harry stood in the exact place she'd left him.

"I, er, got a glass of water?" she suggested, angered at how stupid she sounded.

He merely nodded and after a few moments she placed it on the table, misjudging the distance so it slammed down unexpectedly, causing them both to jump.

"Sorry," she whispered nervously and he nodded again, head bowed low.

She stepped from foot to foot uncertainly, maybe he wanted her to go...she would if she'd just relieved a death, but then again, he looked so shaken up she didn't want to leave him. Just as she'd decided to leave he finally turned around so that a break in the curtains shone a patch of dull light onto his face. She was taken aback for a moment at the state he was in, the look in his eyes and the expression on his face...it was something she thought she might never ever forget.

Without another word she slowly walked towards him and wrapped her arms around him in a tight embrace. After a few moments he did the same, leaning his head against hers and breathing out shakily as if he'd been holding his breath. Silently they stood there, she wasn't even sure for how long, it could have been only a few minutes, but it felt like hours until his muscles finally stopped shaking. Kitty could feel his heart hammering against her own chest, gradually slowing down as she held him, waiting.

Finally he seemed to be sufficiently recovered enough for her to feel like it was time to ask him.

"How did it happen?" she said in a low, deadly serious voice.

Harry gave another shaky breath, seemingly building up the courage to speak. When he finally did, she heard every tremor, every hoarsely whispered word.

"The guy who killed my parents, he made me think they'd got him...my godfather..." he began, tightening his embrace as he spoke, "so I went to get him...but he wasn't there."

Kitty closed her eyes as if feeling his pain, she could already see what was going to happen.

"He came to rescue me," he said finally, voice almost hollow now, "he came to rescue me and died because of it."

"Oh Harry," she said softly, screwing her eyes up tighter.

She felt his embrace tighten slightly and she ran a comforting hand through his hair, which was damp with sweat now.

"I was going to live with him..." he told her after a long pause, "I was going to leave the Dursley's one day and have a home..."

Kitty nodded against his shoulder, she understood completely, she could hear the hidden longing in his voice when he used the word home. Because she knew deep down, that everybody wanted a home,

needed a home, and that she'd finally understood why she'd been drawn to Harry.

They were searching for the same thing.

An impossible thing.

The Order were sat around the large scrubbed table in the kitchen of Grimauld Place, sipping on tea or coffee as they waited for the meeting to commence. They were just waiting for the late comers, namely Tonks, who had not been seen all day and was keeping everyone up. In the end Moody lost his patience and began without her, outlining their plan for the week, which at the present was basically Harry-hunting.

"I suggest that Our Girl - Cathy - is our best lead at the moment – we need to find who her friends and family are, we can suppose she'll go to them," he said gruffly, familiar look of distaste on his face when he talked about her, "so I want names and I want addresses!"

Remus fought the urge to roll his eyes and reply 'Yes sir!' as the rest of them merely nodded, pale faced and worried over their new situation.

"Bill, you did good work on her muggle record search before," he demanded and everyone turned to face him.

"If you can get me in the Ministry again with permission to study some of the more higher access files I could maybe find names of people from schools..." he shrugged, not sounding too hopeful, "but there's thousands of kids at these schools, and she's been to a lot of schools. The chances are slim to say the least..."

"I can get you in," rumbled Kingsley in his deep voice, "you never know..."

"Ok, now Remus, you-" Moody began before there was a sudden flurry of hammering on the front door, "and that'll be Tonks."

Everyone laughed, if only to break the tense atmosphere, and Charlie jumped up to go and let her in.

"As I was saying, Remus if-" he started before getting cut off again by a sudden crash and the loud wails of Mrs Black.

"Definitely Tonks," observed Mundungus dryly and there was more tittering.

Sure enough, a few seconds later Charlie entered the kitchen, closely followed by Tonks who was wearing the strangest combination of clothes any of them had ever seen her wearing, and that was saying something.

"Sorry I'm late guys," she said brightly, not noticing their looks as she shook the rain out of her purple hair.

"What are you wearing?" asked Moody flatly.

She looked across to him as if she didn't quite understand the question before looking back down to her outfit. She was wearing a denim skirt over black tights with her usual purple boots, a similar coloured low cut top and tailored black jacket.

"What?" she asked blankly.

A few people sniggered and she grinned, slightly nonplussed, "It's muggle fashion Moody, not alien."

"You've forgotten your trousers," he pointed out brusquely.

"I am wearing a skirt you know," she said, taking insult, "hope my legs aren't offending you too much."

He gave her a long stare as if to say it was best not to joke with him.

"And why are you wearing muggle clothes?" he asked and Remus looked across to her, interested in the answer.

"Er, because I've been working in the muggle world?" she said as if he were stupid, "And I'm about to go on a date."



“A date?” he asked quickly and she began to laugh.

“Yes dad,” she said and people began to laugh along with her, “is that ok?”

He said something gruffly and she continued to laugh, sliding into a seat in between Charlie and Remus.

“And you’re late,” added Moody.

“Well, how about a present to say sorry,” she asked them, rummaging around in her bag for something.

Everyone looked at each other before shrugging as she whipped something out and slapped it on the table triumphantly.

“Ta daaaa!”

Bill picked it up, studying it closely before flipping it over.

“It’s a page from a book,” he said.

“Ah ha! Not just any old page,” she told them importantly, “this is a page from the 1981 edition of Witch and Wizarding Peerage, Harry’s page to be precise.”

“Let me see that!” said Moody, snatching it out of Bills grip and studying it closely, both magical and normal eye fixed on it.

“Can I be the first person to say; so what?” asked Mundungus, looking around as a few other people nodded their heads, slightly embarrassed.

“Every year a volume is produced by the ministry of all the witches and wizards born, much like the tome Hogwarts uses for student entries,” explained Remus, staring at the piece of paper, “it automatically detects the presence and use of magic by the individual during three periods of life – Formative use, when we’re all children and accidentally do things, Scholastic use, magic we use during Hogwarts and Formal use, when we become of age.”

“So?” shrugged Mundungus, “we all know Harry can do magic.”

“Yes, but it also detects the unauthorised use of magic...” began Remus, as Tonks’ plan suddenly dawned on him.

“Say’s here two counts during the scholastic period, levitation charm on Friday 31st July 1992 and the Patronus charm on Monday 2nd August 1995,” began Moody, still scrutinising the page, “as well as where the infringement took place.”

Tonks had a supremely smug look on her face.

“If Harry uses his wand, we’ll know what he’s doing and where he’s doing it,” she said in a sing song voice, “and the Ministry won’t know a thing – I’ve swapped it with a dudd copy. So no official owls, no messy court appearance...just a time and address.”

Everybody began to chatter excitedly as she basked in the warm glow of success.

“How did you get this?” asked Remus faintly.

“And that’d explain the date,” she said, gesturing to her clothes.

“You’re taking Malfalda Hopkirk out?” asked Bill, grin on his face.

“No, I’m taking Andrew Randell out,” she said, “Malfalda’s off sick, got a bad case of spattergroit apparently, he’s her replacement.”

“Ohh, you’re good,” laughed Bill, plucking the page back out of Moody’s hands and scanning it.

“I know,” she said pompously, flicking her damp hair over her shoulder, “it’s a gift...”

“I’ve never heard of an Andrew Randell,” said Charlie with a slight frown, “who is he?”

“He’s not from around here,” she said, glancing over to the grandfather clock and giving a wide grin, “and he’s currently waiting for me, so I’m off, see you dudes later!”

And with that she was waltzing out of the kitchen, bag swinging wildly from her hands, Mrs Black screeching her departure.

“Well,” said Molly, speaking for the first time.

“Well indeed, this is fantastic,” said Bill, making a copy of the page, “if we each take one of these and keep our eye on it, we’ll know soon enough if Harry’s in trouble.”

“If he uses his wand,” pointed out Molly, “he may be taken by surprise.”

“Well, it’s better than nothing,” he shrugged, passing the pages around “if that’s all Moody?”

“Yes, see you all tomorrow,” he told them all, “I want you in the Ministry tomorrow Bill working on Our Girl and Kingsley, check out those Azkaban files for me again.”

Everyone nodded and started to get up, gathering their parchments and finishing their teas. Remus took a load over to the sink before wandering back to the table for more.

“I can’t believe she’s gone off with a perfect stranger,” Charlie was telling Bill in a worried voice, “he could be anyone!”

“Tonks is a big girl Charlie, she can take care of herself,” replied Bill calmly as Remus collected the cups.

He gave a tsk and shook his head, obviously not the only one in the room who didn’t like the thought of Tonks out on a date.

Harry groggily re-entered consciousness for a reason he couldn’t really comprehend for some time. He felt confused, his head seemed full of fog and he surveyed his surroundings bleary eyed. He was in the lounge, sprawled out of the sofa and after a long moment he

remembered his nightmare, the terrible pain of scar, trying to stay awake for as long as possible...

Shakily he raised his fingers to his scar, it actually hurt to press it and he closed his eyes, trying to remember what had happened. He could remember feeling as if he were actually there, like he was right at Voldemort's side, Death Eaters ranged behind him as they approached the house.

"Bacon sarnie Harry?" came a sudden voice.

He gave a massive start and in his confusion fell off the sofa onto the floor.

"Huh?" he spluttered, looking up to see Donna grinning at him in a slightly worried way.

"Are you ok?" she asked him, bending down to survey him at eye level.

He shook his head slightly, still unable to fully comprehend what was going on.

"Uh...yeah," he said, looking around him vaguely, "yeah...what er, what time is it?"

"Gone 11," she said, still frowning, "are you sure you're ok, you look a bit ill?"

"I er," he began, before sitting up a little more and placing a hand on the coffee table, "yeah, I must be ill..."

She sat back and regarded him with a strange look before offering him her hand, "Well, let's get you up and fed then."

He let himself be hoisted up and stood swaying momentarily. He couldn't figure out why he was so thrown by last night's events, they didn't usually affect him this bad. He ran a hand through his hair, flinching slightly as he knocked his scar.

"I'll get you some coffee," said Donna kindly, "why don't you get a shower or something, wake yourself up."

"Yeah..." was all he could manage, unable to hold proper conversation at all now.

He stumbled off towards the bathroom leaving Donna watching him worriedly as the kettle boiled.

Harry spent a good half an hour in the bathroom, having a long cool shower and trying to clear his mind. He tried to work on the Occlumency techniques that Snape had told him but he found it impossible to shake the horrible feeling in the pit of his stomach. The feeling that something terrible had happened and there was nothing he could do about it.

When he wandered back into the kitchen he was surprised to find Donna waiting at the small table for him. There was a mug of coffee and the promised bacon sandwich sitting in front of an empty seat which he looked at blankly.

"Er, thanks," he said, sliding into the seat, careful not to jar his head.

"You don't look that hot man," she said with a warm smile, "you got the flu?"

"I hope not," he said, with a slight smile, before reaching for the coffee.

She returned the smile and Harry concentrated on sipping his coffee slowly, it tasted horrible but it gave him something to do.

"I heard you up and about last night," said Donna, watching him closely, "couldn't sleep?"

"Er, something like that," he agreed, looking at the bacon sandwich and feeling like he might be sick.

"Bad dreams?"

He looked up at her for a moment – there was something in her tone...and her eyes.

“Just ill,” he reassured her with a false smile.

She seemed to take this as a challenge because after a few moments she put down her own mug of coffee and regarded him steadily.

“Can I ask you something Harry?”

He wished she wouldn’t but had to shrug in agreement.

“What’s up with you and Caz?”

Out of all the questions he was expecting that hadn’t been it and for a moment he simply stared at her. But she held his gaze steadily and he frowned at her.

“What do you mean?” he asked her with a shrug.

“I mean, what are you two doing together?” she asked, getting up and taking her plate over to the sink.

“I still don’t understand,” he said in a neutral voice.

“Well see that’s where we agree,” she said, leaning against the sink, “I don’t even know you, she doesn’t even know you, and yet I can see straight away that there’s is something definitely up with you.”

“Nothings up with me,” he said coolly, also standing up, “and Kitty knows me pretty well thanks very much.”

She merely gave a hollow laugh and shook her head causing Harry to frown at her angrily.

“Oh come on Harry, I’ve got eyes you know. I see you, posh kid, obviously not short of money running away with a girl like Caz! What’ve you done?”

“And what is that supposed to mean?” he asked, riled by her slate, “a girl like Kitty?”

“Why aren’t you answering my question?” she asked, eyebrows arched.

“Because it’s a stupid question,” he said through gritted teeth, “and I’m too busy wondering what her supposed friend is doing saying things like that?”

“Listen, I know you’re up to something,” she cut in, also angry now, “and I want to know what it is if your staying in my home with my son!”

“I haven’t done anything,” he said heatedly.

“Are you in trouble with the police?” she pressed, “drugs? Who are you running away from?”

“My family,” he told her in icy tones.

“Bullshit,” she replied, “what are you running away from?”

“I just told you.”

“Why are you running away with Caz?” she continued, obviously using the multiple question interrogation system.

“Because I am ok?” he told her, “Now are you going to tell me what’s really bugging you?”

“I just want to know who I’m letting in to my house,” she said.

“Well now it’s my turn to say bullshit,” Harry said, feeling the recklessness rising, “if you’ve got something against Kitty and me then just say it!”

Donna huffed and turned to the sink, running the tap and washing her cup up in silence.

“Say it!” challenged Harry angrily, walking over to her.

“I don’t,” she said in quiet, yet anger filled voice, “I just don’t understand what’s going on – what you guys think you’re doing – what you’re doing with her!”

“What is your problem with me being with her!” he exclaimed in confusion, “What is so wrong with that!”

“Because you don’t know Caz like I do!” she practically shouted, whipping around suddenly, “you think you do but you don’t. Nobody knows her – that’s part of who she is! She picks up a friend or a guy and for a while you’ll be flavour of the month until she gets bored and then she’ll just piss off, middle of the night, no word, and leave you to pick up the pieces!

Harry stared at her for a long moment, unable to say anything.

“Trust me, you don’t want to be around her for too long – she’s trouble,” said Donna, bitterness in her voice, “you’ve got no idea what she’s done.”

“With friends like you who needs enemies,” said Harry finally.

“You think this is funny!” she asked him in an unnaturally high voice.

“No I don’t,” he said, staring at her with some amount of confusion, “I really don’t. You’re the only person from her whole life that she’s spoken about and been happy! You’re being so nice to her, letting her stay here, for what? Why the hell are you talking about her like this?”

“Because-”

“Je-sus guys, I hope you’ve got coffee brewing,” came a sleepy voice from behind them and they both spun around guiltily.

Kitty was wandering into the kitchen, braids piled about her head crazily and dressed in baggy pyjamas trousers and a small top.

“My head is a-pounding,” she complained, stumbling towards them.



"All that wod-ka," joked Donna weakly.

"Yeah probably!" she agreed, flashing Donna a smile that was all the more galling for Harry to see, "morning sweets."

"Heya chuck," she said and Harry stared at her hard, how two-faced could you get...

"And good morning to you too, stranger," she said, wandering over and wrapping her arms around his neck.

She leaned forward and placed a kiss on his lips that he just couldn't seem to react to. His mind, that was so full of fog when he'd woken up, was now brimming over with what Donna had told him. Was what she said true? Flavour of the month?

"You ok?" she asked, pulling back and studying him with a frown.

He gave her a fake smile and all at once the frown deepened and she pulled back.

"What's wrong?" she said, instantly on guard, "What's happened?"

"Nothing," he said, smiling again.

"Harry's just feeling a bit ill Caz," came Donna's voice behind them, "sleepless night, eh Harry?"

Kitty turned to look at Donna for a moment and Harry also looked across to her. He couldn't help but feel the anger at her rise up again. There was the briefest look between them and Harry knew this could only lead to no good.

"Really?" she asked, turning back to him with a serious expression on her face.

"Hey, I'm fine," he told her, flicking his gaze across to Donna who looked at him with eyebrows raised before wandering over to the kettle and setting about making Kitty some coffee.

Kitty made sure she was out of earshot of her and turned back to Harry, wrapping her arms around him again.

"Sleepless night?" she asked him quietly with a pointed look.

He shrugged, avoiding her eyes.

"Another nightmare?" she muttered, keeping her back to Donna, who was watching her steadily, "About Sirius?"

"Yeah," he admitted, even quieter, forgetting what Donna had said in light of Kitty's worry.

She pulled him into a hug and this time he wrapped his arms around her.

"Don't dwell on it," she whispered in his ear as they swayed.

"I won't," he promised, looking up to see Donna leaning against the counter.

Watching them.

And smirking.

Remus was poring over a large map of Wolverhampton that had been pinned up on the wall of the kitchen at Grimauld Place carefully pushing red pins into the places Cathy had gone to school, trying to see a pattern when he heard Mrs Black start to shriek. Frowning in annoyance he tried to block out the horrible curses and insults as the pin speared a small town called Bilbrook.

A few seconds later Tonks entered the room, door banging off the wall as he looked over his shoulder to see her face looking positively stormy.

"And what is that supposed to mean?" she was demanding angrily.

Remus frowned and looked over his shoulder again to see Charlie trailing in after her, exasperated look on his own face.

"That doesn't matter right now," he said agitatedly as Tonks slammed her bag on the table, causing Remus to jump slightly, "sorry ok?"

"Oh yes, all is forgiven," she said irritably, tugging at the straps of her bag in an effort to get into it, "you are unbelievable Charlie Weasley!"

"Sorry," he said meekly and Remus wondered what was the big drama this time.

"Whatever."

Charlie was silent for a few moments and as Remus speared 'Cannock' with another pin he heard teacups being prepared as Tonks riffled through her bag and pulling out reams of parchment.

"So, how was your date last night?" asked Charlie in a would-be casual voice.

"Fine," she said, shuffling through her papers.

"What did you do?" he asked as she gave a sigh and looked in her bag for something else.

"We had a meal," she replied, locating the file and sliding it onto the table.

"Where at?" he continued.

"In muggle London, why?" she demanded impatiently as Remus looked over the top of his map at them carrying on.

"Just curious..." he shrugged noncommittally, letting a few seconds silence pass before he started again, "are you going to see him again?"

"Not that it's any of your business but probably not, no," she told him angrily, packing the leftover files into her bag, "Remus, owl me when Dumbledore gets here ok?"

“Sure thing,” he said.

“Why not?” persisted Charlie as though he hadn’t spoken.

“Why do you think Charlie?” she demanded, turning back to face him, hands on hips.

“Because you didn’t get along?” he said in a small voice, quailing under her glare.

“No, that’s not why,” she said, throwing her bag over her shoulder and marching towards the kitchen door. “Why is it then?” he asked, following her.

“Because, dung for brains, I got the file, job over!” she said, walking out of the kitchen.

“What?”

Remus could hear them arguing all the way to the front door and he shook his head, there was definitely no love lost between those two, they seemed at constant loggerheads. However, he couldn’t help but agree with Charlie’s surprise at her reply. So the date was just part of the ‘job’?

For some reason this didn’t feel like something Tonks would actually do and he found himself reassessing her feelings towards Harry’s disappearance. She’s certainly taken it hard and seemed to be single-handedly spearheading the campaign to find him and the girl. He wondered where this deep rooted desire seemed to come from that would make her quite willing to go to extreme measures to catch her quarry.

He thought it might be something to do with her guilt at being on-guard when he was missing.

Charlie wondered back into the room, face like thunder as he threw his cloak around his shoulders, muttering to himself. Remus watched him curiously before he looked up and caught him. The angry face

disappeared and was replaced by a laconic sort of grin.

“Women eh?” he shrugged.

Remus smiled politely, “Can’t live with them-”

“-Can’t kill them,” finished Charlie, before giving a laugh and wandering off towards the fire, “What are you doing today?”

“Playing with maps until your brother gets us some address’s,” he explained, “you?”

“Mums got me running errands for everyone all day,” he said, rolling his eyes, “haven’t got any washing you need doing – I’m sure I’ll be doing that soon too.”

“No I’m fine,” he assured him, wondering why he was so sore all of a sudden, “see you this evening then.”

“Yeah – bye,” he said vaguely, one foot already in the flames.

Meanwhile, Tonks had already apparated to her flat.

Correction, old flat, she told herself in an odd, sort of numb way. Her time period to pay up to Gringotts had come and gone and they wanted to repossess her home. It was ironic really, because earlier that day she’d been handed an eviction notice for not paying her rent.

The floors had been swept, curtains washed, fresh paint applied to the walls. All that was left to show that she had occupied it for the last three years was that faint lingering smell of burnt toast, which seemed to follow her everywhere. However, the empty flat couldn’t be any further from her mind if she tried, she was entirely focussed on the large parchment portfolio she was holding in her shaking hands.

Her mission directive for the next month.

Even now she couldn't fully comprehend it. She'd applied for the position, she'd done the interview, the tests...But somehow she never actually thought it would happen. And there it was in black and white.

She shook her head in disbelief, re-reading the words – sentinel. They made it sound so...so...

She let out a roar of frustration, wishing she still had furniture left so she could kick something.

"Fucking, shitting, bugging hell!" she yelled instead, stamping her feet on the floor, practically screaming with injustice of it all.

Azkaban.

Sentinel.

Just another word for patrol officer, bloody guard! She was going to have to spend 8 hours a day, for the rest of her foreseeable future patrolling the corridors of that place. A Dementor replacement! What had been going through her mind? Had she actually gone insane? What made her want a job like that?

Money, that's what it was whispered the small part of her mind that was relieved she'd got the job. It was the highest paid job she could find – probably because no-one in their right minds would want it, it was too dangerous...And she'd asked for it? All but begged for it?

Well she'd bloody got what she'd asked for hadn't she! The caution money alone would be able to pay off almost half her bankers fees. But she'd probably never get to see that, she thought glumly, now the Dementors are gone she'd have to face prisoner waking up, plotting, planning, waiting for her to slip up...

At that moment she hated her world and everything it stood for – if she'd been born muggle, she could have been worrying about what to do now her University career was over, where to live, what skirt to wear to what interview...

Now...now she was faced with spending almost half her time on the island of Azkaban, the darkest, most evil infested place in the known world. And there was nothing she could do to save herself.

The simple fact was she needed this, the money, she needed it a lot more than she needed her sanity.

The hopelessness of the situation seemed to overcome her, and she couldn't fight and rage and struggle against it anymore, she could only drop her sentence to the floor, place her head in her arms, and cry.

## Chapter Nine

No one knows what it's like,  
To be the bad one,  
To be the sad one,  
Behind blue eyes.

Harry felt odd. He was sitting on the steps that led up to the fountain in the centre of the town with Kitty, the sun was shining and there was the buzz of the Saturday shoppers. Despite all this however, he felt like he was in another world, far away from thoughts of sales and bargains as he wondered about his and Donna's, what would he call it, argument?

The words 'flavour of the month' wouldn't stop echoing around his head, and he couldn't help but dwell. Kitty however was completely unaware, slouched as she was down the steps, enjoying the sun as she ate her burger, watching the people walk past with a slightly superior look in her eyes.

"God, throwback from the 80's or what," she commented, nodding towards a woman walking past, "I thought that colour had been banned in like, 1985 or something."

It seemed to be her favourite game, people watching, and Harry had little interest or contribution to the conversation.

"Mmm," was all that required, as he continued to stare ahead of him unseeingly – he thought about the conversation he'd overheard the night they'd arrived between her and Donna, when she'd accused Kitty of not liking guys like him...

"Eugh, I don't even have to say what's wrong with that," he vaguely heard her say, totally missing her follow up comment.

Harry blinked a couple of times, trying to get used to the contact lenses. It was a very peculiar feeling, being able to see without his glasses, for as long as he could remember he'd had them, and to suddenly have no need for them was like being told it was actually necessary to carry your hands about with you.



“Je-sus Christ...” came Kitty’s voice again.

He didn’t pay any attention to her outburst, no doubt it was someone wearing more luminous combinations of retro clothes that had caught her attention.

“Shit...I used to date that guy.”

This really did catch his attention, his head snapping up in a flash as he searched the crowds. His eyes fell upon a group of about four guys that looked slightly older than him that were walking towards their general direction.

Tracksuit bottoms and flashy trainers, football shirts and baseball caps, shaved heads and hoop earrings – Harry grimaced, he really didn’t like what he saw. He looked over to Kitty, who had suddenly, and suspiciously, abandoned the sunbathing and snatched off his baseball cap, pulling it low over her eyes. She was obviously trying to look as inconspicuous as possible, failing miserably due to her outrageous clothes.

Harry glanced over at the guys heading towards them, they hadn’t noticed her yet and he quickly shuffled towards her, blocking them from her line of sight. She must have noticed the shadow he’d cast because she shrunk into it, pulling the cap even lower across her face.

The guys walked past without incident and after almost a minute she relaxed, pulling off the cap and surveying the crowds again.

“Somebody should make socks and sandals illegal,” was all she said, big grin back on her face.

“What was all that about?” he asked her.

“What?” she said innocently.

Harry doubted if Kitty had ever been innocent in her life.

“Why were you hiding?” he pressed, feeling this was slightly ominous.

"I wasn't hiding," she said, slightly riled, "I just didn't fancy talking to him that's all..."

"Why not?" he asked, eyes narrowing, she had that tone again, the one that said she was hiding something.

And this made him sick with worry.

"What's with all the questions Harry?" she said lightly, pulling out a pack of cigarettes, "it's nothing..."

"Just curious," he shrugged, twisting around and looking after the guys.

He sure felt a bit inferior and couldn't help making a comparison between the himself and them, they seemed so much more like her than he did. Again that small niggling doubt returned to his mind, what was she doing with him, he just couldn't figure it out. The silence stretched over them and for the first time since he'd met her it was almost uncomfortable – he wondered if this was because of him or because of Donna.

"He was a complete shit Harry," she said finally, looking over to him with a serious expression on her face, "a real nasty piece of work. Don't compare yourself to him."

"I wasn't," he lied, looking off to the side so she couldn't see his expression.

"Well, fine then," she said, sounding a little unbalanced, "just so you know anyway..."

Kitty didn't like doing serious, he'd quickly realised. She hated being honest and talking about things and not playing with grins and smiles. So when she actually did act like this it was so obvious she was uncomfortable, the only time he ever really got the feeling she was unsure of what she was doing. She always seemed to have plans, back up ideas in case things went wrong, witty comebacks and snappy remarks.

She was purposely not looking at him now.

“Have you had a lot of boyfriends?” he blurted out, before his brain kicked in and he gave an inward grimace of embarrassment.

“A few,” she shrugged, tapping ash into the fountain.

“How many is a few?” he asked, again before he could stop himself.

She looked over to him now with a grin playing across her lips, she was enjoying herself again.

“Why would you want to know something like that?” she teased him playfully.

“Just curious,” he shrugged.

“You’re very curious today,” she said, before giving a slight laugh, “and we all know what curiosity did?”

“Killed the cat?” he asked, also smiling now, the previous tensions seemed to evaporate in a plume of her cigarette smoke.

“And the witnesses,” she agreed, nodding thoughtfully as she smiled to herself.

“You still didn’t answer my question,” he pointed out, now in a more welcoming tone.

“I forgot what it was now,” she said, “and you didn’t answer mine.”

“You didn’t ask me one,” he said, slightly confused now.

“I did, I asked you how many girlfriends you’d had?”

“No you didn’t,” he protested, feeling his cheeks flush slightly at the thought of talking about this.

“Yeah I did, just then,” she laughed as he fell into her trap, “well?”

“Well if you must know, one. Sort of, at least I think so...” he said, remembering the odd setup he and Cho had had last year.

“You think so?”

“It was complicated,” he told her.

“So complicated you weren’t even sure if you were going out?” she asked, eyebrow arched.

“It’s a bit harder at boarding school,” he explained, trying to dig his way out of the uncomfortable situation, “you’re completely separated most of the time...”

“Surely that would have made it fun?” she teased, “creeping around corridors in the dead of night, hiding under beds, disused classrooms?”

He gave an embarrassed laugh, thinking about his invisibility cloak, night time wanders in search of trapdoors, illegal chambers or the kitchens...For some reason he’d never thought about using his invisibility cloak to visit the Ravenclaw common room.

“What was her name?” asked Kitty, basking once again in the sun.

“Cho.”

“Was she good looking?” she asked him.

He shrugged noncommittally.

“Prettier than me?”

Harry suddenly felt like he was on very dangerous ground. He looked at Kitty in panic, trying to actually think about how to get of this situation alive. She narrowed her eyes at him suspiciously, before breaking into a wide grin.

“Je-sus Harry, you’re so easy to wind up!” she laughed.

He almost melted with relief.

“And you’re so quick to make fun,” he replied easily.

“That’s why you love me,” she stated, before laughing again.

Harry looked at her curiously – she was joking again.

“Heya sweetie!”

Tonks twisted around to see her best friend Geri dodging through the crowds of late afternoon shoppers towards her, waving and grinning widely. Tonks got up and gave her a friendly kiss on the cheek, before pulling her into a hug, greeting her warmly as if she hadn’t seen her for months.

“Whoa, what’s the special occasion?” asked Geri, pulling back and holding Tonks at arms length and studying her closely.

“Just a friend in need,” she said, as they sat down in their booth.

Geri waved over to the barmen with a flick of her perfectly manicured hand, quickly ordering a round of drinks and settling back. She had a knowing smile on her face.

“So, do I have to guess?” she asked.

“Nah,” said Tonks, suddenly not feeling like she wanted to talk at all.

“Well...?” prompted Geri when she didn’t elaborate.

The drinks arrived and Tonks could use this as a useful diversion for only a few moments before Geri’s bright brown eyes were studying her closely.

“Ok, ok,” she muttered, before her squaring her shoulders, “I’ve got more problems than we’ve got hours to sit here.”

Geri laughed, picking up her handbag and rooting around it, pulling out a pack of cigarettes, "Well, lucky for you I've got tomorrow off! So, let's start with a list and we'll try to work our way down?"

"Ok," said Tonks, taking a deep swig of her drink and bracing herself, "1, Money. 2, the flat. 3, Harry. 4, Remus. 5. Charlie, 6. Azkaban. 7, Dad. 8, Health."

Geri puffed away thoughtfully, nodding at each number as if she understood perfectly and didn't look surprised or question any of them. However, her features began to cloud slightly and Tonks saw the same thing that had happened ever since they'd become friends on the platform 9  $\frac{3}{4}$ , whenever she was upset, Geri was upset. It was like some kind of unwritten rule: if they were down, the other would be, there could be no other way.

"That's a long list," said Geri eventually, also taking a drink, "and briefly, what's the worry about each of them?"

"Well, Money – lack of, flat – soon to be lack of, Harry – definite lack of, Remus – likewise, Charlie – too much, Azkaban - likewise, Dad – health, Health - worry."

"Well, let me start with the one I know most about – health. What's up?" she asked and Tonks took another deep sigh.

"It's like fifth year...I just feel so...bleugh," she said emphatically, as the neighbouring booth looked at her outburst oddly, "I wake up more tired than I went to sleep, I've got absolutely no energy and this constant headache and I just feel so...down. Like nothings going right and it never will."

"Depression," said Geri, looking worried, "like you said, it's fifth year all over again. The more you think about it the worse you'll become."

"Easily said," muttered Tonks, staring at her glass glumly.

"Tell you what, I'll whip up a batch of something to help you," offered Geri, with an encouraging smile, "just to help you get over the worst patch."

"I can't take anything whilst I'm on duty without telling them," said Tonks at once, having already thought of that, "and we're not allowed to take anything that will affect our mental state..."

Geri frowned slightly and cast around for a solution. Tonks gave a heavy sigh and silence pressed down on them before Geri gave a small look around her.

"You could...just take something, you know," she said in a low voice, "and not tell anyone...I could make something untraceable?"

Tonks stared at her for a few moments, wanted desperately to say no, that it was unethical and against the rules, but right at that moment, she wanted nothing other than the blissful happiness that Geri could create in an afternoon. It had all but got her through her fifth year, would there be a problem doing the same now?

"I'll get one made up," said Geri, understanding her silence, "now, move onto the next point – Harry?"

"I can't really say very much," said Tonks awkwardly, "but he's still missing, still no sign and it's all my fault."

"What do you mean!" she exclaimed, looking annoyed at Tonks, "you always blame yourself! It's got nothing to do with you."

"I was on duty when he escaped," she said glumly, feeling the storm clouds gather above her head even more now.

"Hey, if he planned it as much as you say, then he would have found a way to get out," said Geri, patting her hand warmly, "and no one could have stopped him. You were protecting him, not guarding him. So stop beating yourself up about it and relax."

"Ok," said Tonks in a small voice.

Geri caught the attention of the barman again and soon two more drinks were whinging their way to their table, along with the bar snacks menu. Tonks suddenly remembered she'd forgotten breakfast

again and was surprised to find her stomach wasn't crying out for food. She actually felt quite full, but ordered some chips just to stop Geri worrying.

"So, what was next?" asked Geri, pulling another cigarette out of her packet.

"Remus," said Tonks, even more depressed now.

Geri gave her a sympathetic look, before lighting her cigarette with a wave of her wand. She took a deep inhalation and released a plume of smoke, looking deep in thought.

"Nothing's happened?" she asked finally.

"No," said Tonks, suddenly catching herself and realising how desperate she sounded, "no. I just think nothing can ever possibly happen."

"You don't know that," said Geri with a frown, "there are a lot more important things to worry about at the moment I guess. Just give him time, you can't rush these things."

"There isn't anything to rush," muttered Tonks.

"God, you are the depressed one today," said Geri with a frown, "you've just got to take it easy, if he likes you, he'll soon realise, and if he doesn't, then, well, there's plenty more fish in the sea..."

"That's such a lame saying and completely not helpful," said Tonks before gulping down her drink.

"But true – just remember when we went into our seventh year you were convinced you were going to be Mrs Charlie Weasley when we left," she said with a grin and a shrug, "times change."

"Don't remind me," scoffed Tonks, "but I just feel like this is different, you know? I really want..."

"Him?" supplied Geri with a grin, filling in Tonks' silence.



Tonks gave a laugh, but didn't deny it and Geri nodded knowingly.

"Listen, you two are good friends, from what you've told me, right?" said Geri and Tonks shrugged noncommittally, "well - you work together a lot yeah? In my experience, working together often leads to something more – look at me and Steve. Give it time..."

"Yeah, perhaps," said Tonks in a sullen voice that said she truly didn't want to wait.

"You've got to give him time to get over the whole age difference thing – 14 years in a long time," pointed out Geri.

"13 actually," said Tonks, before giving another deep sigh, "you're right – of course you are – it's just that...right now I'd love someone to be here with me, you know? Before I had Charlie, but now I'm just..."

"Lonely?" finished Geri, before nodding heavily, "I know sweetie, but try not to think about it. And I'm here, I'll do anything I can possibly do, you know that right?"

Tonks gave a warm smile over to her friend, feeling inexplicably touched by what she just said, "Thanks chuck."

"Speaking of which, old Chucky was on that list too wasn't he," said Geri in the hope of dragging Tonks out of the gloom, "what's the story?"

"He's driving me insane," she said with a roll of her eyes, "I'm convinced he thinks we're going to get back together, despite every single thing pointing against it!"

"Well you better tell him sooner rather than later, you know what he's like," she said, calling over for another round of drinks, "there isn't anything going on, is there?"

"No, of course not!" exclaimed Tonks emphatically.

“Good, I don’t think I could cope if you two got back together again,” she grinned and Tonks laughed too, both remembering the old times.

Just then the door to the pub opened and they both looked up against the chill that swept across their ankles. It was a group of men a bit older themselves, deep in conversation and wrapped up in black cloaks, unnaturally thick ones at that for the weather. Tonks narrowed her eyes suspiciously and watched them order their drinks and sit across the way from them.

“You’ve gone into official mode,” noted Geri, noticing Tonks had got out her wand and placed it on the table.

“Hard habit to break,” said Tonks vaguely, craning her neck slightly to watch the men talk.

Geri merely rolled her eyes but seconds later she too had put her wand on the table next to her.

“I think I recognise one of them, that’s all,” said Tonks, more covertly watching them this time through the slats in the headboard behind Geri.

“From work?” she asked, sounding slightly worried now.

“Yeah.”

“Maybe, we should head off then, why don’t we go round yours and have a few more drinks? Steve’s at home at the moment redecorating James’ room?” she suggested, trying to sound casual but looking unnerved.

“That’s something I actually wanted to talk to you about today,” said Tonks suddenly, snapping her attention back to Geri, “you see...my place is going to be completely refurbished by my landlord soon – apparently having new carpets and tables is more important than actually getting rid of the mice or damp.”

“So, where are you going to be living?” asked Geri, looking worried.

"Well, I could get a room somewhere, but what I wanted to ask was if-" she began cautiously.

"You can stay with us for as long as you want," cut in Geri, smile on her face.

"Really?" Tonks exclaimed, looking immediately ecstatic, "that'd be ok?"

"Of course," said Geri with a laugh, "did you even need to ask?"

Tonks grinned widely, feeling for a few short seconds like all her worries had been solved.

"As long as you don't mind being woken up every few hours by James?" added Geri.

"Babies I can cope with," she replied, getting to her feet, "it's everything else I have trouble with."

"Moan moan moan," Geri joked as they headed for the fireplace, "you're a little bundle of joy!"

"I know, that's why you love me," replied Tonks, giving her friend and impromptu hug, "thanks Geri."

"No problem sweetie, it'll be like being back at school!"

Harry and Kitty had found themselves in a small nearby takeaway, squished into a red plastic booth as they ate their heavily fried dinner, Harry dragging it out as long as possible so they didn't have to go back to the flat and Donna's creepy behaviour. He hadn't managed to bring it up with Kitty yet and wasn't quite sure how to start on the I-think-you-friends-a-psycho conversation.

"So Harry," asked Kitty, oblivious to his deliberations as she popped chip into her mouth, "what's your favourite type of film?"

“Erm...” he began, casting around for something he’d seen at the Dursley’s before giving up, “I don’t really watch movies.”

“Really?” she said incredulously, chip hovering mid air now as she stared at him.

“The Dursley’s aren’t really a big fan of the cinema,” he tried explaining.

“But you must watch them on telly?” she said, looking as if she couldn’t actually comprehend not watching movies.

“No, not really,” he shrugged, “I never watched much telly.”

She continued to stare at him and then gave him a suspicious look.

“Are you joking?” she said with a small smile.

“Nope,” he said, taking a slurp of his milkshake, “I just don’t.”

She gave a slow nod before a wide smile spread across her face.

“In that case, let us begin your cultural education!” she said happily, “we’ll watch some movies tonight! What do you fancy? Action, Sci-fi?”

Harry felt a little lost and after a moment gave a shrug and said, “I tell you what, you chose, leave it in the capable hands of the expert.”

“Cop-out,” she grinned.

“And proud,” he laughed, “what’s you’re favourite?”

“I’m a big horror fan,” she said, leaning back in her chair as he took a big bite out of his burger, “anything with a ghost, vampire, monster or werewolf is good for me.”

Harry nearly choked on his burger as she said this and for a panicked few seconds he was coughing and being slapped on the back by Kitty. When he finally managed to breathe again and looked up to her, eyes watering.

“Werewolves you say?” he said weakly.

“Yeah,” she said, leaning back, apparently satisfied he wasn’t going to die, “I love all the big Hollywood horrors.”

Harry continued to nod his head, feeling slightly like one of those toy dogs in the back of cars, he couldn’t really think of anything else to do – or say.

“My all-time top-ten characters are the Wolfman,” she began, ticking it off on her finger, “Count Dracula, or Nosferatu whichever you want to call him, Frankenstein’s monster, the Mummy, the Thing, the Creature from the Black Lagoon, King Kong, Quasimodo and the Phantom of the Opera.”

Harry stared at her, mouth hanging open slightly, she looked at him expectantly.

“That’s only nine,” was all he could think to say.

“Oh, the Zombie too,” she said, pleased smile on her face, “which one do you want to watch?”

He tried to kick his vocal chords into gear, “I couldn’t possibly begin to choose...”

“Ok,” she said, munching on a chip thoughtfully, “well, how about we start with the basics? Werewolves, vampires or zombies?”

“I can tell by the way you’re waggling you eyebrows that you really want to watch a werewolf film,” he pointed out and she gave a pleased smile.

“Right answer!” she quipped, “ok, all we need to decide now is; classic Hollywood or modern action?”

“What’s the difference?” he asked with a sinking heart, it looked like he was stuck now.

“Well one is black and white with rubber masks, zips on suits visible where beautiful women go ‘Aiiii’ a lot and fall into the arms of the dashing male lead,” she said with a grin, “or the other is more realistic and gory – there’s this really excellent one where you see this guys windpipe being torn out-”

“The first one,” he cut in quickly.

“Squeamish Harry?” she asked him, eyebrows raised.

“Not at all,” he said with a fake laugh.

“You’ve gone all pale,” she pointed out, grinning even more, “you’re not going to hide behind the sofa are you?”

He threw a chip at her and she bobbed her tongue out at him.

“You won’t be going ‘Aiiii’ a lot will you?” she continued to tease.

“No,” he replied stoutly as she pulled scary faces at him.

“Don’t worry – I’ll protect you,” she snickered, before leaning towards him suddenly, roaring with her hands raised like claws.

Harry jumped backwards in shock and she collapsed in a fit of laughter. He shoved her in the ribs and quickly retaliated, beginning a tickling match that soon escalated to the point where their fellow customers were shooting them annoyed glances and the ketchup was spilt on the floor.

Tonks sat on the unmade bed, staring around her surroundings, feeling as if they were suffocating her slowly. Sirius’ room was exactly the same as she and Remus had left it the night he’d been drinking; exactly the same as the night he dropped everything and went to the Department of Mysteries.

Sometimes she almost forgot Sirius was dead, she’d walk into Grimauld Place and walk into the kitchen in search of him, she’d pour an extra cup of tea out, set a place at the table for him...Sometimes, when it was quiet and she was all alone, she actually found herself

calling out his name to see where he was, before the realisation hit her and she sighed with relief that no one was there to witness it.

And there were other times where it seemed to hang over her, days where it was so apparent he was gone that she couldn't believe people were going about their normal lives, getting on with things, moving on, forgetting. Where the sight of even the word 'black' made her shake, where she misheard the word 'serious', where she'd see one of his mugs...

Today was one of those days.

Tears trickling down her cheeks she looked around the room, taking in his meagre possessions, studying the photos that had been pinned to the wall. Third year Harry, Ron and Hermione walking across Hogwarts grounds, obviously taken when they weren't aware. Various shots from his youth as well as the one she remembered vividly being taken - Christmas, not seven months ago, her and Sirius, Christmas hats and fake beards. Another one drew her gaze, an older, battered photo of him, James, Peter and Remus in the Gryffindor common room.

Remus, she thought sadly, how does he cope? Tonks had only had a year reunited with her cousin, Remus had been his best friend...how can he not just want to stand and scream out with grief, frustration, anger, sadness...

She shook her head as if to clear the thoughts. Far from easing the pain of the loss, being around Sirius' things didn't make her feel closer to him, it just threw into sharp relief his disappearance. With a shaking hand she picked up the small notebook that was on his desk, opening to the marked page.

Sirius' handwriting greeted her eyes and she could only read the first sentence of his 'to do' list before she couldn't take it anymore. Hastily she dropped the book back onto the desk, falling back onto the bed and giving in to the grief, sobbing into her hands.

Sometime later she heard the door to Sirius' room open quietly and someone enter. She instantly gave up on the thought of composing

herself, instead she merely tried to stem the tears as much as possible, looking up to see Bill walking over to her.

Without a word he sat down on the bed next to her and wrapped an arm around her, into which she fell gratefully. She never liked crying in front of anyone, ever since she was young, but right now she didn't think she could stop if she wanted to. The image of the photo of her and Sirius seemed to be permanently pasted onto her eyelids.

After what seemed an age her tears seemed to dry up until she was left staring at the wall with unseeing, itchy eyes, head still resting on Bill's shoulder.

"I miss him Bill," she admitted in a watery voice.

"I know Tonks," he sighed, also looking around the room, "we all do."

She nodded heavily.

"Come on baby sis," he said, trying to inject some humour into his voice as he jostled her shoulder, "let's go downstairs, you shouldn't be in here."

Tonks looked around the room, whatever she was waiting for here wasn't apparent yet, but she found herself unwilling to leave.

"You go down," she said, extricating herself out of his arms, "I'll just...stay for a bit."

"Are you sure?" he asked doubtfully, "It's not good to stay here..."

"I know," she said, rubbing her face wearily, "but I want to just..."

She didn't even know what she thought it was achieve, but she had to.

"Ok," he said, standing up, "see you in a bit."

"Yeah, bye..."

He left the room, shutting the door and Tonks looked around again.



"I miss you big cus," she told the room, before feeling slightly stupid.

But it made her feel slightly better for saying it. She just wanted to talk to someone about what had happened, but everyone seemed to think that silence was the only way to deal. The subject was skirted but never broached, people trailed off sentences, left them hanging in the air...it wasn't the way. Apart from Remus' drunken rant no one even mentioned his death - what kind of a way to show your gratitude was that?

He died protecting them all, protecting wizardkind, and what thanks did he get?

Silence.

Most of the country still thought he was a murderer.

He didn't deserve it.

"You didn't deserve this Sirius," she told the room, in a stronger voice.

He was a good man.

"People should know."

"Remus," came a voice.

He turned around, finding Bill walking towards him with a slightly anxious expression on his face.

"What's wrong?" he asked instantly.

"No, nothing's wrong as such," he said quickly, understand the man's alarm.

He came to a halt in front of him and threw a look up the stairs.

"It's Tonks," he said uncertainly.

“What about her?” asked Remus, alarm rising once again.

“She’s been in Sirius’ room for about four hours,” he said in a low voice, “I went to see her and she was crying for a while. She said she’d come down about two hours ago.”

Remus also looked up the stairs now worriedly.

“I’ll go and see her,” he told Bill, already moving towards the base of the stairs.

“Thanks,” he said gratefully, “Dinner’s nearly ready too and Dumbledore will be here.”

Remus nodded and began to climb the stairs, worrying about Tonks. She was, he’d realised long ago, a very complicated person who made everyone think she was very uncomplicated. And she’d taken Sirius’ death hard, he could still picture her face when she’d woken up in hospital after the battle, when she’d been told he’d gone...

It was something he didn’t think he’d ever forget.

He came to the door to the room everyone had silently agreed was out of bounds, but which was visited regularly by almost everyone in the Order in secret. He didn’t bother knocking, pushing it open slowly to look into the dim room. Tonks was sat on the bed, shoulders slightly hunched as she stared ahead.

Silently he walked over and sat down next to her, staring ahead to where she was. And there they sat for almost ten minutes, both silently saying what they’d never be able to put into words; the grief, the loneliness, the anger. What it meant to miss someone.

“I keep expecting him to walk in,” she said in a quiet voice.

“Me too,” said Remus heavily, “every time.”

She gave a dry sniff, sighing heavily.

"I keep seeing him too," she admitted, sounding like it was almost against her will, "in the street, in the house, the ministry..."

"I know," he nodded, "me too."

"I know how Harry felt now, seeing that dog in Diagon Alley..." she said in a hollow voice.

"I don't think he believes he's gone either," Remus told her, "it's going to take a while."

"How long?" she asked him in a grief filled whisper.

"I thought I saw Lily yesterday," was all he said.

Tonks nodded heavily, rubbing her eyes wearily. She wanted to talk more about him, but now it seemed almost impossible. She'd been waiting for so long for someone to just talk to her about him, and now it seemed Remus almost wanted to, but she couldn't. She wanted to explain what she'd been thinking about, about Sirius' name, how it shouldn't be dragged through the mud anymore, how he should be praised by everyone for what he'd done.

"I have to visit my mum tonight," she blurted out, taking herself by surprise, "and my dad."

Remus just nodded, now understanding what had put her into this mood.

"How is she, since all this happened?" he asked her, turning to look at her once again.

"It didn't help," she said in a far away voice, "I don't think she even understands, or even remembers who he is anymore..."

Remus sighed, the fate of Andromeda Tonks was one he wouldn't want to wish on anyone, let alone the woman who, when he was young, remembered with such fond memories.

"Sometimes I get the feeling she doesn't even recognise me," Tonks said sadly.

"Isn't there anything that could be done?" he asked after a while.

"No. Believe me when I say I've tried."

"I know," he told her, wanting, but seemingly unable to just reach out and console her, "how's your dad doing these days?"

"Soldiering on," she said, giving a weak smile, "he misses mum though...he does his best..."

"I'm sure he does," he told her, "it must be hard for him."

Tonks shrugged, "He just jokes that we we're cursed...sometimes I think he's right."

She climbed to her feet, picking up her cloak, turning to face him sadly.

"I better go, see you about Remus."

And with that she was gone and Remus was left to stare after her. Poor Tonks he couldn't help but think, her family were one of the nicest he'd ever met, and they had been plagued by tragedy since he could remember. He thought about what she'd said for a long time.

If Andromeda couldn't remember Sirius anymore, couldn't recognise her own daughter, he knew there wasn't much time left for her.

Harry and Kitty were sitting at a small café in the centre of the city of Wolverhampton, chatting easily about random and far reaching subjects as they enjoyed the hot summer weather. Harry was forcibly reminded of Florean Fortescue's ice cream parlour in Diagon Alley as a large sundae was placed between them and two spoons.

They began to dig in a Kitty gave a sudden snigger, he looked up to her smiling, "What?"

“Just want to warn you, there’s no way I’m ever doing that,” she nodded to the table next to them where a woman was feeding ice cream to the man opposite her, cooing quietly.

Harry snorted into his ice cream and finally resurfaced to see Kitty trying to hide her laughter behind her hand as the woman glared over at them.

“I’m glad,” he told her emphatically as the man opposite proceeded to feed the woman a cherry.

They amused themselves for several minutes by providing a running commentary and voiceovers for the couples actions until they were effectively silenced when the waiter walked past them with a disapproving glare.

“Maybe he’d prefer it if we simpered over our whipped cream,” Kitty giggled, before scooping up a spoonful of cream, “Oh honeykins, have a widdle bit of cweam...”

Harry burst out laughing even more and Kitty pretended to be offended, pouting and batting her eyelashes at him.

“What’s a matter babycakes?” she cooed, leaning forwards and hovering her spoon in front of him, “Can’t take my spoonful of hot, burning love?”

“Shut up!” he spluttered, raising a marshmallow threateningly, “I’m just as capable of being gross with confectionary.”

“Oh, I’m all hot under the collar,” she purred, leaning back and fanning herself ostentatiously, “I love it when you talk dirty Harry.”

Harry really did lose it this time and Kitty couldn’t keep a straight face any longer, laughing hysterically along with him. He was just wiping a tear from his eye when a jolly ditty began to emanate from Kitty’s bag. She swallowed her laughter and searched around in her bag quickly, drawing out her mobile phone.

She looked at the screen, frowning slightly at it, causing Harry's laughter to trail off slowly. She glanced up at him with an odd look on her face before answering it.

"Yeah?"

"Oh, hello, is this Cathy Earl?" came the voice, a young female by the sound of it.

"Who is this?" she said and Harry looked at her curiously.

"My names Natalie Tonks," said the woman in a kind sounding voice.

"How did you get my number?" she asked the stranger and Harry mouthed over 'Who is it?'

She gave him a frown and a shrug and he put down his burger and watched her intently.

"Your boss over at the Rabbit and Hound gave it to me," explained the mysterious woman and Kitty felt the first prickles of suspicions.

"What do you want?"

"Well, I was just trying to find a friend of mine, he went missing a couple of days back and his family are very worried for him," she said.

Kitty, who'd been staring at nothing looked up to Harry, who had suddenly gone very pale. She didn't know what to say for a second, feeling her heart beating furiously against her ribcage.

"Well, who is it?" she finally asked, putting on her 'chronic liar' voice.

"His names Harry Potter," said the woman quickly, obviously relieved Kitty was still on the line and trying to get in as much information as possible, "he's got black hair and green eyes and a scar on his forehead."

"I don't know anyone like that," she said, finding herself unable to look away from Harry's intense gaze, he seemed to be trying to hear the

conversation through her, "I knew a Harvey once, if that's any help, except he had blue eyes I think."

"Listen Cathy, I know you know Harry because you went to school with him," said the woman, suddenly sounding like the words 'cut the crap' was about to be said.

"Did I?" she asked, doing a good impression of sounding surprised, "god, you know, so many schools and so many new people..."

"I saw you with him last week," said the voice flatly.

"Did you? Well, would you imagine that?" laughed Kitty, insides writhing slightly now, "I've always said I've got a sieve for brains."

"Please," cut in the woman, "can you tell me if he's with you?"

"Listen lady," Kitty said in with a harsh tone, "I don't know any goddamn Harry, so you can just get off my line ok?"

"I know he's with you!" she said desperately, obviously realising she was loosing the battle, "you've got to tell me where you are!"

"I'm not telling some psycho phone stalker where I am," laughed Kitty.

"Please, he's in real danger," begged the woman, "there could be anybody following him or-"

"Well if I ever meet this elusive Harry, I'll tell him the goddamn mafia are after him, ok?" asked Kitty, watching Harry who, if possible, went even whiter.

"I'm being serious," said the woman through gritted teeth.

"So am I," replied Kitty, "now I don't know who you are, and I don't know any Harry, green eyed or not. So you can just piss off, alright?"

"Can you tell him something for me then?" said the woman.

"Hey..." growled Kitty, "didn't you hear what I just said?"

“Can you tell him, that we all miss him and we need him back. Tell him Moony is sorry for everything and he says Snuffles wouldn’t have wanted this, that he’d be disappointed in him. But most of all, tell him he needs to keep his eyes peeled and his Ollivanders at hand at all times, and that he’s going to need chocolate, lots of chocolate.”

“Ok, now I know you’re psycho,” said Kitty, shaking her head at the nonsensical ramblings of the woman.

“And tell him to come back, tell him Shunpike will do it – that we won’t be angry with him – we’d rather see him home with us than dead on the streets,” she finished, sounding tearful, “he knows more than anybody that this is just what Riddle wants.”

“Whatever,” said Kitty in a bored voice, “bye.”

She ended the call and carefully placed her phone on the table, staring at it thoughtfully. Harry was staring at her and she looked up to him, noticing for the first time just how worried he looked.

“Who was it?” he asked in a hoarse voice.

“Some woman called Natalie Tonks,” said Kitty carefully, measuring his reaction.

“Natalie Tonks?” he asked, a puzzled look in his eyes.

“Yeah – who is she?” she asked and Harry sat back in his chair, running a hand through his hair so that it stood up in all directions.

“She’s a…” he began, before suddenly thinking of something, “she’s Sirius’ cousin.”

“Ok,” she nodded.

“What did she say?” asked Harry, sitting forward once again and looking quite wild in the eyes.



“She babbled a load of nonsense I didn’t understand – somebody called Moony is sorry,” she said, pausing to measure his reaction, but he merely paled a little more and nodded for her to continue, “and that Sniffle would be disappointed...”

“Snuffles?” he asked, a shadow of pain taking over his features.

“Yeah, that’s right,” she said tentatively, “who’s that?”

“It’s this stupid nickname we gave Sirius once...” he said in a hollow voice, “Sirius would be disappointed...”

“There was more,” she said, hoping to snap him out of the grief she could see taking over him, “She said you need to keep your Olivers, not that’s not right, your Oliganders-”

“Ollivander?” he said and she nodded.

“Yeah, she said keep your eyes peeled and your Ollivanders at hand, and some about needing lots of chocolate?”

He visibly paled at this and she could also see his hands start to shake. She looked at him feeling suddenly very anxious – why would needing chocolate provoke such a response?

“Anything else?”

“Yeah, they said Shunpike would get you home, and that they wouldn’t be angry at all, and that you being dead on the streets is exactly what Riddle wants.”

Harry stared at the table for sometime and Kitty watched him carefully, slightly worried at how he was taking the weird ramblings of the stranger.

“Who’s Riddle?” she asked, watching as he ran his fingers over his scar vaguely.

He looked up at her with an unreadable expression and Kitty felt a prickle of fear.

“The guy that did this,” he said, gesturing to his scarred forehead, “that killed my parents.”

“Shit Harry,” she said, skin now tingling with cold in the hot summers sun.

Harry ran his fingers through his hair again and for some time she didn't say anything, merely watched him work himself up into a stress.

“Harry...” she began anxiously, before trailing off. What could she say?

“Listen, lets er...lets go, yeah?” he said, already standing up quickly.

She was worried about how pale he looked. Kitty climbed to her feet quickly and dropped a few coins onto the table. Harry did the same and began to walk quickly away from the café, staring all around him as if he expected to be jumped at any moment. Kitty thought about all the nonsense she'd just heard that had worried him so much, none of it made any sense to her yet she was also now seeing shadows in the crowds, feeling like she was being watched.

She drew closer to him instinctively and he gave her a brief look of surprise before taking her hand and intertwining his fingers with hers. For the first time since she'd met Harry she felt like she'd had a glimpse into what it was like to be him, what the fear was he held in his eyes, his protectiveness of her, the way whenever they were out and about he was tensed up, as if ready to fight. She couldn't help but wonder who these nameless people that were after him were, what his family done that meant they should be murdered, what Harry's life before she met him had been like.

She stole a sideways glance at him and watched him scanning the crowds incessantly. He was wound up so tightly now that his grip on her hand was a little too fierce and she felt that now would be the moment she had to say something, do something, comfort him some way. But before she could open her mouth she was jostled roughly by a large man trying to push past her. Harry practically yanked her

backwards until she was hidden behind him, glaring at the man fiercely as he pushed his hand into his jacket pocket.

“Sorry about that son,” said the man quickly, holding up his hands at Harry’s open hostility and backing away.

Harry didn’t say anything and Kitty couldn’t seem to speak through her tight throat, it had all happened so quickly and taken her so much by surprise that by the time she even thought of reacting, the man was retreating quickly. His eyes had been fixed on Harry’s jacket and the hand that was still inside it.

After a second the nerves and the shock got too much for her and she smacked Harry on the arm roughly.

“Ouch!” he yelped, spinning around to her, “What was that for?”

“You are such an idiot!” she hissed at him, “have you brought a knife out with you!”

“What?” he asked, frowning in confusion.

“You were going to pull a knife on him!” she said incredulously, wacking him on the arm again, “in broad daylight, are you insane?”

“What are you rambling on about?” he hissed angrily now, too worked up now to think properly.

“I saw you putting your hand in your jacket!” she practically shouted back at him, smacking an arm against his pocket, “you’re on the fucking edge Harry!”

She began to storm off and Harry cursed under his breath, plunging his hand into his jacket pocket once again and drawing out his wand discreetly. He quickly stowed it in his bag and jogged to catch up with Kitty, who was striding ahead and trying to lose him.

“Kitty!” he called, ignoring the odd looks he got from the people around him, “Kitty wait!”

She stopped and spun around, hands on hips as she waited for him to catch up.

“What?” she asked him finally.

“This is stupid Kitty,” he began, “I-”

“Don’t you ‘this is stupid’ me,” she snapped, before lowering her voice against the stares, “you were supposed to be different - how can you even think-”

“I didn’t have a knife for Merlin’s sake!” he burst out, flinching slightly at his choice of words.

“What the fuck is that supposed to mean, Merlin’s sake?”

“It means I don’t have a knife, I’ve never had a knife and there would be no way that I would pull one out in the middle of a mugg - shopping centre!” he said in exasperation, “Come on Kitty - this is me we’re talking about!”

She looked at him uncertainly, eyes flicking to his jacket momentarily, before looking him straight in his eyes.

“Why would I even do that?” he asked her, feeling like she was coming around.

“Harry I was freaked out enough by that phone call and you’re getting more and more freaked out every day!” she told him, trying to soften her tone when she saw the look of panic that crossed his face at this, “Listen it’s ok, I understand why you’re scared and I haven’t forgotten that you were trying to protect me...but, no more weapons ok?”

“I don’t have any weapons,” was all he could say to this.

He opened up his jacket to show her his empty pocket wordlessly, too busy wondering what she meant by him getting ‘more and more freaked out everyday’. Kitty silently pressed a hand against his pocket for a second and then looked away, cheeks flushing darkly.

“Jesus-Christ,” she said, sounding mortified, “I’m so sorry Harry...”

She dropped into the bench near them and zipping his jacket up and feeling terrible for lying, Harry sat down next to her.

“I can’t believe I just accused you of...” she trailed off, putting her face in her hands.

Harry felt even guiltier now, she’d been right after all, he had been halfway through pulling out his wand and hexing the man seven ways till Sunday when he’d realised it was a muggle. What was wrong with him? Was he going to spend the rest of his life looking over his shoulder, worrying if the next black coated person is wearing robes, if the next person who randomly shouts ‘Harry’ in the street had recognised him?

“Sorry Harry,” she said in a small voice, face still in hands, “I’m crap.”

“It doesn’t matter,” he said in a faraway voice, “we’re both just on edge...”

She nodded fervently and for a long moment they merely sat in silence.

She looked across to him, “The phone call freaked you out didn’t it? I mean, more than you letting on.”

He didn’t reply, merely studying his hands intently.

“It scared me,” she admitted in a whisper.

“Why?” he asked blankly - she didn’t even understand the code words, what they meant...

“Because someone’s after you Harry,” she told him, and he could hear the terror in her voice, “someone who’s already done terrible things to you, who wants to kill you...”

She raised a trembling hand to her mouth as if she couldn’t speak any more without all the fear and terror inside being let out. Silently

Harry wrapped his arms around her pulling her close to him, knowing there was no way he could deny what she said, only try and make it easier to cope with. Kitty held onto him tightly, trying to figure out what she thought and understand what she was feeling, breathing deeply yet shakily.

"It is going to be ok, isn't Harry?" she asked him, not really knowing why, it sounded so lame and childish, even to her.

"Maybe, one day," he told her softly and she took another deep breath.

"If he even touches you I'll kill him," she said vehemently, taking herself by surprise.

Where had that come from?

"My bodyguard," joked Harry, smoothing down her hair.

She gave a choked laugh and drew back, studying Harry's face intently as she tried to imagine what it would feel like to lose Harry, if this Riddle person caught up with him, how it would destroy her world.

Harry seemed to read her mind because he gave her a slight smile, "I'm not going anywhere you know - you're stuck with me sorry."

"I don't mind," she shrugged, trying to lighten up herself, "you're fun to have around anyway."

"Nice to know I'm appreciated," he laughed and she gave a smile.

Harry smiled back, finding it hard to keep all his thoughts within his head now - his worries about Voldemort, Tonks' phone call, Kitty's worry...He felt like something big had just happened between him and Kitty, although he couldn't put his finger on what it was, he just felt different now. Different towards Kitty, and it was better somehow.

But she still isn't asking you to explain, he warned himself.

And one day she will.

Tonks stumbled out of the fireplace of Grimauld Place into the kitchen, banging her knees on the stone flagged floor with a wince and a curse. She muttered something under her breath and slowly got to her feet, looking around to see if anyone had noticed.

She was greeted by almost the entire Order, sitting at the kitchen table, all staring.

“Wotcher guys,” she said painfully, brushing her palms onto her jeans and trying to appear more calm and collected.

Everyone stared back at her solemnly and she instantly tensed up, something had obviously happened.

“What’s wrong?” she asked anxiously, leaving her bag on the floor as various items rolled off, “something’s happened hasn’t it?”

“Not really,” said Bill, giving her a funny look.

In fact, she realised, looking from face to face, they were all watching her in a very peculiar way.

“If it’s about me missing last night, I’m really sorry, I was-” she began anxiously.

“It’s not about that,” he said, giving a look towards Kingsley.

“Well, what is it?” she demanded, feeling slightly angry, why were they messing her about like this?

“Kingsley tells us you’ve got a new job,” said Moody accusingly and Tonks felt suddenly slightly ill.

They were all waiting for her to explain but she could do nothing but shrug her shoulders.

"Yeah, I have," she said, picking up her bag off the floor and stuffing her work robes back into them, "didn't realise that was such a big deal."

"It's at Azkaban," said Charlie, sounding torn between anger and disbelief.

"Yeah?" she shrugged, avoiding everyone's eyes, "And?"

"And you didn't think of telling us?" exclaimed Molly, and Tonks jumped slightly, as if a child being reprimanded.

"I only started today," she said, giving a nervous laugh that fell on deaf ears, "oh come on guys, why are you acting as if someone's died? It's just a job."

"In Azkaban," pointed out Charlie accusingly.

"Yes, I had noticed," she snapped.

"It's incredibly dangerous!" said Molly and Tonks knew instantly what she meant, it's too dangerous for you, you can't do it.

"The prisoners are in cells you know, not running around free range," she told them, still hovering in front of them as if being interviewed.

"It's still dangerous," said Molly pointedly.

"So is being an Auror but you're not saying anything against me doing that," she told them, before narrowing her eyes suspiciously, "or are you?"

"Of course not Tonks," said Bill soothingly, shooting his mother a look, "we just wondered why you're doing it."

Because I need the money she felt like shouting at them, because if I don't this I'm going to be out on the streets, I'll starve to death, I'll be hunted down by the goblins...



“Isn’t it obvious why she’s doing it?” asked Moody gruffly, and everyone stared at him, including Tonks, “Information.”

Tonks felt a swell of relief – that was a fantastic reason why she doing it! They couldn’t say anything against that.

“What better way to gather information than to guard the scum?” he said and they all looked back to her, realisation dawning.

“Yeah - of course,” she shrugged, sliding into her seat next to Charlie.

“Anything to report yet?” he asked her.

“Too early to say,” she replied, glancing around the table to see not only Remus, but Charlie and Snape giving her odd looks.

“Well, try and get something for tomorrows meeting, if you make it,” he cautioned her, “Dumbledore is coming and he’ll want some news on the Harry and Azkaban front.”

“Sure thing,” she nodded.

He began to speak again, this time over the latest items of gossip he’d gleaned from his ‘reconnaissance’ mission to the pubs and haunts of known Death Eaters. Tonks just zoned him out, thinking of her first days shift and how it really wasn’t worth the money they were paying her. That place was hell, and Gringotts were breathing heavily down her neck. As she worried about her situation the conversation washed over her and she was surprised to find what seemed like seconds later the whole room beginning to leave.

She looked around at them blankly, before also getting her feet. If she rushed back now she might have time for some dinner and maybe even an early night before her shift at the Ministry tomorrow.

“Tonks, could I speak with you for a moment?” asked a voice from down the corridor and she felt her stomach give a slight lurch.

She turned around to see Remus walking towards her and she gave wide smile, before trying to calm down her emotions.

“Of course,” she said, trying to jig her bag between her arms and completely failing to catch it.

She muttered a curse and threw herself down onto her knees, trying to gather her assorted items that had rolled out.

“Here let me help,” he said, also kneeling down and gathering the reams of parchments that had fluttered everywhere.

“It’s ok!” she said, sounding slightly panicked as she saw her illegal potion beneath a stack he was reaching for.

“It’s no problem,” he said, giving her a slightly curious look as, quick as a flash she reached out and planted the potion bottle into her robes.

“Are you ok Tonks?” he asked her as they continued to gather items and drop them bag into her bag, “you seem a bit flustered.”

“Me? Flustered?” she said quickly, “No, not at all...it’s my new hair colour, doesn’t really suit me right? You know how it is! Or I suppose not-”

He didn’t say anything and she inwardly cringed, before rubbing her face with her hands and continuing, she needed to focus and him being there wasn’t helping at all...

“And I’m babbling,” she said, giving a nervous laugh, “shoot me now.”

“Shoot...?” he asked in puzzlement.

“Oh, I’ve got that,” she said suddenly, trying to reach for something he was picking up but was too late.

It was a large pack of five chocolate bars and he looked at them for a long moment and again she cringed inwardly.

“Sweet tooth,” she explained, snatching them out of his grasp.

She knew he taught Defence at Hogwarts and wondered how clued up he was about magical creatures. She finished packing the bag and picked up her second pair of robes, standing up and giving him a bright smile.

"Thanks," she said in a plausible impersonation of being cheerful and turned to go, "see you later!"

"Are the Dementors a problem?"

She paused mid-turn and gave a grimace, looks like his knowledge of magical creatures was ok. When she turned back to him it was with a carefully composed expression.

"There are no Dementors at Azkaban," she said evenly.

"Not physically," he said with a raised eyebrow and she felt her face begin to flush.

"It's not a problem," she told him defiantly, "everyone gets it the same – we must be the only job that gets paid half our wages in chocolate."

She didn't expect him to laugh at her joke and was proved right when he gave a frown.

"Remus – it's not a problem, ok?" she told him seriously, "I know my cheering charms, I got my patronus sorted out a long time ago, a bit of honeydukes makes everything go away."

"You've only been there for a few hours, what happens after two-three weeks of exposure?" he asked her, with the oddest expression in his eyes.

"There aren't any Dementors there anymore, the vibes are leaving the place, and anyway, prisoners lasted years there with daily exposure and survived..."

He gave a look that said talking about 'surviving' a job wasn't what he wanted to hear and Tonks felt even worse. He cared, that much she could tell, but it wasn't for the reason she wanted, she wanted him to

worry about her because he cared about her. Feeling even more awkward and alone now she made the mistake of looking up into his eyes. As usual she felt like all the wind was being knocked out of her lungs and he had no idea she thought, he doesn't even realise what he makes you feel...

"Why are you doing this Tonks?" he asked her in a quiet voice.

"We need the information-" she began.

"That's not the reason and you know it," he cut in, "I saw the way you leapt on Moody's theory like it had saved you."

You had, she thought strangely, how had he noticed that?

"Well, we do need information," she shrugged, avoiding his eyes now, "stop worrying about me, I'm a big girl, I can take care of myself."

He looked like he didn't really know how to reply to this and she felt even glummer.

"It's just a job," she told him, hefting her bag up ready to go.

"But why Azkaban?" he asked her.

She looked up to him curiously, there'd been a very strange tone in his voice just then. Then she realised what it must have been – Sirius.

She gave a sad smile and shrugged her shoulders.

"Why not?"

Hi everyone, thank you for the reviews, i love to hear feedback!

I have sorted out the problem with no scene breaks thanks to feedback, anything else bothering you - tell me!

## Chapter Ten

No one knows what it's like,  
To be hated,  
To be fated,  
To telling only lies.

Harry's life as a muggle was a simple one. Every morning by the time he awoke on the sofa of Donna's lounge she had already gone to work and taken baby Jason to her mother and fathers. Greg her boyfriend seemed to work during nights and as such Harry had only briefs conversations with him when he returned in the morning and went to bed. Kitty seemed to believe getting out of bed before one in the afternoon unnatural and as his nightmares were increasingly encroaching on his sleep he had hours on his own in the flat to while away.

Most of this time was spent reading the only textbook he'd brought with him, defence against the dark arts, or watching daytime tv. He was secretly hoping some of the popular culture of muggles would sink in so he didn't sound too suspicious when Kitty began chatting about something he had no clue about. He was beginning to relax now towards the fact that the Order couldn't seem to trace him or Kitty and he realised the anti-tracking potions he'd drank (and drugged Kitty with) were working perfectly. Apart from Tonks' phone call to them, he had seen or heard nothing from the magical world.

When Kitty finally awoke they would sit on the sofa and chat over a mug of tea or coffee for an hour or two before she could be bothered to get changed and then leave the house. They always caught the 49a bus into Wolverhampton city centre, which was big enough for them not to get bored walking around every day. More often than not they wouldn't buy anything during their hours spent walking around shops, content to spend their money in cafes or takeaways, where they spent the majority of their time.

Harry had become so used to this state of affairs that he never fully realised that they never spoke about the future, what they were going to do when either they outstayed Donna's welcome or she finally did what her creepy behaviour and suggestions had been threatening

and go psycho on them. It seemed Kitty wasn't planning on going back to school anymore as she had turned 16 and instead was talking about getting a job in the city centre. Harry didn't like the idea of this, because it meant he'd only see her in the evenings and he would miss her too much, but he'd realised that Kitty was absolutely obsessed with money.

She was always talking about how little they had, trying to think up schemes to get them rich quick which she called her 'Del Boy schemes'. He kept telling her that he had more than enough money to cover them both for a long while, having drawn out a substantial amount of muggle money from Gringotts, but she seemed to take offence to this. Sometimes he was forcibly reminded of Ron's behaviour, especially when she practically stopped talking to him one day just because he'd bought her a movie. In a way he knew however that she wasn't angry at him for doing it, just angry at herself for some reason, she kept telling him she hadn't been dropping hints for him to buy it, and that she'd pay him back.

"It's a present!" Harry had told her finally, almost angrily, "Am I not even allowed to buy my girlfriend a gift?"

This had effectively shut her up and since then she'd said no more about the movie, but instead kept trying to buy him things in repayment. He put it down to the insanity of girls in the end and let her get on with it. But at least he knew she liked the present, he'd seen the movie himself now about five times and she'd often just put it on whilst they were chatting as background noise. Harry didn't particularly like Kitty's choice in movies however, she seemed to watch nothing but horror and Harry often found himself being left sickened from the movies - finding the werewolf or torture scenes particularly uncomfortable. Kitty had noticed this and had begun by teasing him about it, although she soon stopped, obviously noticing Harry's expression or perhaps thinking what he'd told her about his parents, Sirius, Riddle and his scar.

Their evening were usually spent watching tv or movies in the flat as Kitty seemed almost as eager as Harry to stay in the flat after dark. He wondered secretly whether this was because she was worried about her stepfather - who, according to those back in Surrey, was

apparently keen on catching up with both him and her after their last meeting. He also pondered the fact that he had not thought to look for Kitty here, at her old best friends home, but thought back to the various hints dropped by Donna and her strange behaviour towards him. Perhaps this was the last place Kitty was expected to be - whatever had happened in the past between Donna and Charlie was bad enough for her to hold all this resentment towards her. But it was odd, if she didn't like Kitty so much, how come she was letting them stay, and how come she was so nice to Kitty?

He hadn't spoken to her about him and Donna's argument yet, deciding to wait and see what was going to happen - as much as he hated it, they were relying on Donna and Harry didn't want to go back on the streets just yet. One evening, a few days after Tonks' phone call to them, Harry and Kitty had managed to stop thinking about his past catching up with them, yet were enjoying another night in the safety of Donna's flat. This time however, it wasn't a horror, Harry had finally begged her to choose something different and so she had opted for a musical comedy.

"This is an absolute classic," murmured Kitty later that night.

Harry smiled and looked down at her. She was stretched out on the sofa, head on his lap as she struggled to open a small bag of popcorn.

"It looks old," he said by way of an answer.

"1952," she replied, snuggling down more, "cold in here."

He grabbed her jumper off the side of the sofa and lay it down on top of her, tucking it in before wrapping his arm around her, "Better?"

"One week and we're already an old married couple," she commented dryly, before twisting slightly to look up to him, "thanks."

"That's ok," he said before giving her a smile, "now how are your bones? Aching?"

“Oh yeah, been giving me jip all week,” she croaked out in an elderly voice, snuggling back down, “fancy a mug of hot milk and we’ll watch Corrie?”

“Corrie?” he asked.

“Coronation Street? The soap?” she reminded him, giving a laugh, “where’ve you been, in a hole the past decade?”

He gave a nervous laugh and began to watch the film again in silence, thinking about the amount of times she’d caught him out, not knowing about latest music, films, everything from politicians to football – he didn’t have a clue. And Kitty was smart, she’d eventually figure out something was up, and then what would happen?

“Can you believe they can do that?” came Kitty’s voice, disturbing him from his thoughts, “that’s a real actor, being able to sing, dance and do a scene, without a break.”

“Mmm,” agreed Harry, thoughts still on his worries.

“I mean, this scene right, it’s been going for around 4-5 minutes yeah, without a camera cut, and he’s really dancing!” she said excitedly, “I’d love to be able to dance like that.”

“Have you ever tried?” he asked her interestedly, realising this was the first time she’d ever made any reference to something she wanted to do.

“Only free-styling in the clubs,” she laughed, twisting around to look at him again, “never did lessons or nothing. I remember there was this girl we went to school with, you know, Natasha Dean?”

Harry shook his head to say he didn’t recognise the name.

“Oh well, her mom and dad sent her to all sorts of stuff like that, ballet and tap and stuff,” she said, and he could hear a hint of jealousy in her voice, “she used to do the Can Can in the playground and kick everyone as she was doing it, sorta chasing them round – horrible girl.”



“At least she didn’t put paint in people’s hair,” Harry said simply, eyebrows raised.

“Hey, I didn’t really do that,” she protested, swatting his arm.

He gave her a look.

“Not much anyway.”

She gave him a cheesy grin.

“I can’t even look at a pot of primary red acrylic now without feeling the fear,” he told her in mock seriousness, “I hope you’ve realised you’ve scarred me for life.”

“You are such a plank,” she said, before smiling softly, “are you really annoyed at me because I was horrible to you?”

“Nope,” he said, lacing his fingers with hers, “I just thought you were mean-hearted and evil – nothing personal.”

“Oh yeah? Well I just thought you were a freak of nature! Guess nothing’s changed huh?”

“Oh ha ha!” he said, “ho ho – very droll.”

“I know, I do try sometimes,” she laughed, before snuggling down further again.

Harry draped his arm around her waist and watched the two actors on the screen tap-dancing on the desk. After a while however, she twisted round and looked at him, slightly perturbed.

“I was really horrible to you at school,” she told him as if they hadn’t just had the previous conversation.

“Doesn’t matter,” he shrugged.

"It does - why did you speak to me?" she asked him, very strange expression in his eye.

"What? When?" he said, completely confused now.

"On the bus - why did you speak to me if I was so bad?"

She was sitting up now and looking at him slightly suspiciously.

"Because you spoke to me," he said, looking at her just as strangely now, "what do you mean?"

"Well, I was such a bitch to you all through school - so why did you speak to me then? I wouldn't have spoken to me if I was you," she pointed out, "why did we go to MacDonald's?"

Harry tried to think of reason to explain this and couldn't. So he decided to shift the attention.

"Why did you come to my house, if I was such a weirdo?"

"Because," she began defensively, before sagging slightly, "because I did..."

They stared at each other for a few moments, both trying to figure what they were getting at. She was right, Harry thought, there was no reason why he should have spoken to her, no reason for him to want to go to lunch with her, no reason for him to kiss her...But he did, and that begged the question...

"Why?" prompted Harry, curious now.

Because she was lonely or perhaps she was curious? Or was she just bored? She was uncomfortable now, that much Harry could see, she looked almost angry for him asking...

Suddenly she got up and after a moments pacing picked up her pack of cigarettes and lit up. She folded her arm around her waist and stood in the centre of the room, surreptitiously watching him as she stared at the wall. Why was she suddenly so stressed?

"It doesn't matter," he said finally, trying to break the weirdly strained atmosphere, "let's just watch the film..."

She looked as if she wanted to disagree, but didn't say anything.

"What's the problem?" he asked, sitting forward now, "so we didn't like each other then, so what? That was then, this is now..."

"Yeah," she agreed, finishing her cigarette surprising quickly and flicking it into the ashtray.

He looked at her, completely nonplussed now - he had the feeling he'd done something wrong.

"We never really talk about before, do we?" she asked cryptically.

"Before?" he asked neutrally, prickle of fear creeping over him.

She didn't say anything for a moment, shuffling closer to the sofa.

"Why you left...the Dursley's...stuff," she said hesitantly.

"There's nothing to say," he said firmly, turning to watch the film again.

She bit her lip and sat down next to him. She was trying to be serious again and it always unsettled him, especially the way she kept going to say something, thinking better of it and snapping her mouth shut. He couldn't help his thoughts running back to the letter in his backpack, Antonius Quibell, Sirius, the Order, Voldemort...Kitty would never even begin to understand, and this made him so sad but also almost angry.

"Something's have to be said."

He looked across to her, almost surprised. He'd been so lost in his own thoughts he'd forgotten why he starting having them.

"There's nothing to say," he repeated, shrugging.

He wasn't ready for this conversation.

"Then why the nerves?" she said quietly, resting a hand on his knee, which he'd unconsciously been tapping.

"Because you're acting weird," he teased half-heartedly.

"I'm just worried Harry!" she told him.

He was so taken aback at her admission that she was not totally in control of everything around her that he merely stared at her for a few moments.

"Why?" he said blankly.

"Because!" she stated, "I don't know what it is you're running from, and you know what I am, you've seen it and I've told you, when I never tell other people..."

She wants to know, was all he could think. She's sick of questions with no answers and secrets...

"Say something!" she protested, swatting him on the arm a little too hard, "Don't just stare at me as if you're finishing the conversation in your head!"

"Kitty," he said awkwardly, turning away from her accusing look, "I don't know what you want me to say."

"Yes you do."

"What?" he asked stolidly, refusing to look at her now.

"I just want you to trust me!" she said emphatically.

"I do trust you," he told her awkwardly, "there's just nothing to tell..."

"Yes there is," she stated, sounding almost hurt.

Harry didn't say anything, staring off at the tv screen as she watched him, frustration growing.

"Harry?" she asked, as if expecting more than an answer.

There wasn't anything he could say that she could understand, so he didn't say anything at all. Kitty, he could see out of the corner of his eye, had the look of deepest hurt spread across her face. When she finally accepted he wasn't going to say anything more, she jumped up again and headed into the kitchen. Harry gave a heavy sigh, rubbing his eyes with his hand, he wasn't entirely sure what just happened, but he knew it wasn't good. When she returned she handed him a glass of coke wordlessly and sat down beside him, but not next to him.

"Kitty-" he began awkwardly, wanting to explain or apologise.

"Let's just watch the film," she said impassively, "okay?"

He turned back to the t.v. glumly, taking a sip of his drink. He wished she'd put a shot of whatever strong smelling alcohol she had in her glass into his.

"It's left here dear, Ottery St. Catchpole."

The words tore Hermione out of her deep thoughts and she glanced out the window, seeing the familiar village flash past as her parents drove her once again to The Burrow. She had insisted on withdrawing them from the Floo Network, no matter how useful it was it was just too dangerous these days, and as such driving by car was the quickest way she'd be getting anywhere.

"Hermione," said her mother quickly, "tidy yourself up a bit we're nearly there."

She nodded wordlessly, packing her book into her bag, almost laughing at herself for thinking she'd be able to read during the trip. How could she think of anything else except Harry's disappearance? She still had trouble believing it, even now, even with the letter from Ron clutched in her hand. Even with a second letter, explaining

similar circumstances but looking a lot more tear stained and distressed from Ginny. She folded these both away and into her bag as they pulled up the long dirt track road to The Burrow, self-consciously running a hand through her hair and rubbing some life back into her face.

The engine was killed and Hermione climbed out of the car, her parents following suit, looking up at the creaking edifice of the Weasley household with well concealed antipathy. Despite her parents misgiving, Hermione couldn't help but feel a warm rush of affection for the place she'd come to spend as much time in as her own home, remembering summer lunches in the garden and winter evenings in the living room playing chess.

Mrs Weasley she saw, was standing in the front yard, scattering feed for the chickens and looked up to see them in surprise.

"Hermione dear!" she cried, rushing over, abandoning her poultry, "we didn't expect you until this evening!"

"Hello Mrs Weasley," she said, allowing herself to be engulfed in the motherly hug, "we caught an earlier flight home. Any news?"

"No, nothing as of yet. Mr and Mrs Granger," she paused, wiping her hands on her apron and shaking each of her parents hands warmly, "lovely to see you again - would you like some tea?"

"That'd be lovely," her mother said gratefully, "it's been a long trip."

"Why don't you go and see Ron," suggested Mrs Weasley tactfully, "he's down in the garden, I think he'd be glad of the company."

Hermione merely nodded and set off at once, through the courtyard, around the kissing gate and into the tangled wilderness of the Weasley garden. A horrible knot seemed to have developed in her stomach ever since she'd heard the news from Ron, but now it seemed to increase even more, as if being surrounded by magic suddenly made it more realistic.

Rushing forward even faster she caught sight of familiar ginger Weasley hair amongst the apple trees down by the river. Sure enough as she got closer she recognised Ron, looking out of place in muggle shorts and a tee shirt slowly picking apples off the nearest tree. In his arms was a large wicker basket, already looking full of apples and Hermione halted, watching Ron working away silently for a moment, knot in her stomach decreasing slightly.

"Hi Ron," she said finally, walking over towards him quickly.

He spun around, apple in hand, forgotten.

"Hermione," he said blankly, "you're early."

He tried to hide the basket from her view, ears turning red with embarrassment.

"We caught an earlier flight back," she explained once again, "your mum said there was no more news?"

"No, nothing," he said heavily, placing the basket on the floor and dusting his hands off on his shorts, "no ones got any idea where he is."

"Oh no," she moaned, trying desperately to stop the tears from threatening once again, "I don't understand how this could have happened!"

"Me neither," he shrugged, dull resigned look on his face, "the Order's being really secretive about it all as well."

"Tell me everything you know," she said urgently, "everything!"

Ron nodded, placing the basket at the foot of the tree and walking with her down to the river. Explaining how he'd found out about Harry's disappearance, what Remus had asked him about the girl he was with, Ginny's suspicions.

"She's called Catherine Earl," he said a while later as they sat on the river bank, "she's a muggle from his primary school or something..."

Hermione looked mystified, "But he's never spoken about her, never told us about her!"

Ron shrugged, obviously Hermione shared the hurt feeling of Harry abandoning them for a perfect stranger with no word to them about his plans or fears.

"He always tells us everything!" she said, voice rising quickly, "We've always been in it together! And now he just leaves...? I don't believe it!"

"They're quite sure he hasn't been kidnapped now," Ron supplied glumly, prodding a stick into the mud by his feet.

"Who is she anyway?" asked Hermione indignantly.

"Just a muggle," he told her.

"She must have Veela blood in her somewhere for Harry to be acting so stupid," she huffed.

Ron didn't think it would be the best thing to suggest the girl actually was really pretty and instead pulled the photo Remus had given him a few days back now of Harry and the girl, handing it to Hermione. She took it wordlessly, studying it intently for over a minute. Ron could see by the look on her face what Hermione thought about the girl.

She seemed to have trouble knowing where to start.

"What do you reckon?" he pressed a few moments later.

"Well now I know why Harry likes her," she scoffed finally, throwing the photo onto the mud, "she's a tart."

"Hermione!" said Ron, slightly shocked, "That's a bit harsh!"

"I don't care," she sniffed, "looks at her clothes and her hair, you can tell! It not the same as in the magical world Ron, with muggles you



can really tell what people are like from the way they choose to dress.”

She sounded so despairing of him for a second he was almost sidetracked into anger.

“She could be really nice!” he countered, feeling stung into antagonising her.

“You’re just saying that because she has big boobs or something!” she snorted.

This time Ron really was offended.

“Oi, you’re angry at Harry not me remember?”

She looked angry for a moment before deflating slightly and looking across the river.

“Sorry Ron,” she apologised a moment later, “I’m just...Confused.”

“Yeah well,” he said, shrugging.

“No really, I’m sorry.”

Ron only nodded and an uneasy silence fell over them as Hermione stared at the photo on the floor, watching Harry saying goodbye to the girl over and over again. She tried not to look at the girl, feeling anger boil up inside of her at the merest thought that she was the cause of all this worry and fear.

“He looks bad doesn’t he?” she said, almost to herself.

Ron looked down to the photo as well.

“Yeah,” he agreed heavily, “a lot worse than when we left him.”

Hermione studied Harry’s pale face, noticing the pinched look it had and the dark rings under his eyes.

"He's having nightmares still," she observed.

"Probably even worse now," Ron agreed, "with Sirius..."

"It's been a horrible few months," she said glumly, watching photo Harry intently, "he must be really messed up, to pull a stunt like this..."

"I eavesdropped on one of their meetings with Ginny," he admitted, looking slightly worried of her reaction, "they had a copy of conversation they'd had with this posh sounding woman that they were discussing. She sounded like a Healer or something, she said something about Harry not being balanced and having a weird grasp on reality. I reckon she was saying Harry's gone barmy."

"Ron," interjected Hermione harshly.

"What! It sure as hell sounds as if he's gone mad," he countered angrily.

Hermione tried to think of a retort before deflating slightly.

"How could we not have known?" she whispered guiltily, "How could we not have seen what he was going through?"

"We could," Ron told her, "it's just we're so used to seeing him cope with it that we just forget..."

"Forget what?" she asked him, amazed by his insight.

"That sometimes you can't."

Harry was just pouring out two glasses of orange juice when Donna walked into the kitchen, closely followed by Greg her boyfriend, who was carrying Jason.

"Good morning," she said happily.

"Morning," he acknowledged, giving a brief smile over to them before turning back to the glasses.

How was he going to sort out whatever happened last night with Kitty? He knew for a fact she was really angry with him for reasons he wasn't entirely sure of, all he knew was that he had to apologise to her as soon as possible, before she had time to dwell.

"Unless that's for me, it's gonna go to waste," said Donna suddenly, nodding to the second glass in his hand.

"What?"

"Caz, she's gone out," she explained, putting a frying pan on the stove and heating it up.

"What?" he repeated incredulously, "But it's nine in the morning!"

Greg began to laugh, "I thought that was a bit strange too - I didn't think she knew there were two nine's in one day."

"When did she go?" he asked, still slightly taken aback.

"At about eight?" suggested Donna and Harry's stomach plummeted.

He understood enough to know that this was a bad, bad sign.

"Where to?"

"I dunno, she just grabbed her bag, said she'd be back later and left," said Donna, looking at him curiously now, "you two had a fight?"

"I'm not really sure," he said worriedly, dropping onto a kitchen chair.

"Ah, one of those fights," said Greg wisely, "the kind where they don't actually tell you why they're annoyed, you have to figure it out."

Donna shot him an annoyed look but he merely smiled at her sweetly.

"What happened?" she asked, sitting down opposite him.

"I'm not really sure," he said, slightly mystified, "she just kept saying I didn't trust her and that she wanted me to tell her something - I don't know what."

"Well there you go then," said Donna with an air of finality, "that's Caz's problem."

"What?" he asked, still completely in the dark.

"Trust," she supplied, making Harry feel like he was the only one not in on some great secret, "Caz has big trust issues-"

"-Monumental trust issues by the sound of things," supplied Greg, nodding at Harry in sympathy.

"-And if she thinks you don't trust her, then you're in big trouble," she finished

"But I do trust her! There's just wasn't anything to tell her!" Harry said, sounding dismayed.

"Listen, a bit of advice Harry?" said Donna seriously, "Caz gets these ideas in her head right, she convinces herself of a lot of stuff that might not necessarily be true ok? If she thinks you've got something to tell her, then you better find something quick ok?"

Harry nodded wordlessly, before looking up at the girl, "What do you mean, stuff that might not necessarily be true?"

"She's convinced the whole worlds against her," said Donna as Greg beside her nodded as if he'd heard it all before, "that everyone has secrets like her."

"Secrets?" he asked quickly.

"Stuff like her dad, her mom, mysterious bruises that she blames on being clumsy, even though she's the most in control person you ever did meet," she replied, "her sudden disappearances for weeks, months, even years at a time. She's never told any of us about it,

even though we all knew, so if she's said something to you, then she expects something in return."

"She obviously thinks you understand right?" added Greg, "it takes a lot for people like her to trust people - anyone really."

"She never trusts anyone, really," said Donna, and even Harry's glum state he heard a hidden meaning in her words, "Does she trust you?"

He nodded mutely, before running his hands through his hair, "You don't know where she's gone?"

"Nope. But she'll be back, don't worry," Donna said, looking slightly shocked at his confession, before adding, "We're out all day and tonight, so you've got the place to yourselves to make up."

Remus stepped through the fire into Tonks' living room, noticing immediately the lack of possessions, he'd expected the usual clutter and mess she seemed to thrive in, but the whole place was empty, stripped bare. It was as if with the wave of a wand she had banished everything, including the half eaten meals and dust balls the size of quaffles that had colonised the carpets.

Feeling instantly alert he walked into the room.

"Tonks?" he demanded, wondering why the hell she'd be moving.

She appeared in front of him so quickly he wondered for a second why he didn't hear the crack of apparation, taken aback slightly at the wand pointing straight at him.

She stared at him for a long moment as if she wasn't sure who he was.

"Wotcher Remus," she stated, looking as surprised as he felt.

"Hello Tonks, is this a bad time?" he asked cautiously, finding her standing there so tense in an empty room quite disturbing for some reason.

“What?” she asked, before shaking her head slightly, “No, of course not...I was er, just finishing up.”

“You’re moving?” he stated, watching her as she looked at the room in puzzlement.

“Yeah,” she said in a vague sort of a way, “landlord wants to refurbish the building...”

“Really? That’s a little short notice isn’t it?” he asked her, still feeling as if her raised wand was pinning him against the wall.

“Tell me about it,” she sighed, before glancing up at him sharply, “what are you doing here?”

She almost sounded angry and for a moment Remus tried to step backwards, back hitting nothing but solid wall, she seemed to realise how she sounded however because a weak smile flickered across her face.

“Sorry, that was really rude,” she apologised, running a hand across her face, “sorry.”

“No problem,” he said, eyeing the wand slightly cautiously.

She looked at him curiously for a moment, before following his gaze to her wand and dropping it instantly. She hadn’t seemed to realise she’d been threatening him for so long.

“Right...sorry, tea, tea...” she said vaguely, turning around again and surveying the empty room for a minute, “I think I packed my pot...”

And off she went, disappearing under the archway into the empty kitchen leaving Remus to edge forwards, feeling increasingly more alarmed at her odd behaviour. When he entered the sterile kitchen, it was to find her knelt on the cold floor, rummaging around in a cardboard box.

“Tonks, are you ok?” he asked, crouching down beside her.

"Fine," she said instantly, eyes locked on the box's contents.

He frowned deeply, watching as with increasing irritation she pushed things aside until a sudden crunch told him something breakable had done just that.

"Look, sit down," he said finally, conjuring two armchairs and motioning her over, "I'll make the tea."

With a flick of a wand two mugs of tea appeared and he handed hers wordlessly, busying himself studying her as she drank gratefully. They eventually drained the last dregs before he felt confident enough to speak.

"So, are you going to tell me what's wrong?"

"Nothing is," she replied, curling her legs up beneath her in the deep chair, "just tired."

"You look more than tired," he observed.

"Thanks," she smirked sarcastically and he merely raised an eyebrow at her.

"No problem," he said steadily, "why are you tired?"

"Lack of sleep," she merely said, "my heads everywhere."

"Well then you need to get some rest," he told her, "you have got another place to go haven't you?"

"Yeah," was all she said, no details.

"Well, go home."

"I can't," she mumbled, burying her head into the arm of the chair.

"Why not?" he asked, frowning again at her odd behaviour.

"Because I have to go home," she replied in a muffled voice.

"I don't understand," he said.

"I have to go and visit my mum and dad," she said in an even quieter voice.

He nodded quickly, finally understanding the reason for her strange behaviour, her family was a very touchy subject for Tonks.

"Is she ok?" he asked gently, for fear that the situation might be more serious than she thought.

"She fell over yesterday dad said," she told him, looking over to him through a shield of dull brown hair, "apparently she was trying to find me in my cot..."

He watched her feeling painfully sorry for her.

"She can't even remember I'm not a baby anymore Remus," she said painfully, "and I don't want..."

"What?"

"I don't want to have to see that anymore..." she whispered, guilty and self-loathing look in her eyes.

"I know you don't Tonks, I wouldn't either," he tried to comfort her, "but she needs you, you're dad needs you..."

"I know," she said in a strangled tone, "but it hurts...too much...I can't take it anymore...all of it..."

In shock he watched her raise her trembling hands to her face as she began to cry, quiet, grief filled tears that seemed to echo around the empty room loudly.

"Tonks...don't," he tried, shuffling out of his chair and kneeling in front of hers.



She shook her head as if to say she had no choice in what was happening, trying to pull in calming breaths that turned into nothing more than shuddering sobs.

“Come here,” he said in a low voice, pulling her into a hug which she gratefully received, burying her face into his shoulder.

He sat in silence as he let her cry, rubbing her back in what he hoped was a comforting manner, understanding why she was so upset but wondering what Tonks meant by not being able to take it anymore?

“Tonks?” he finally asked when he heard the tears subsiding.

She didn’t reply at first, pulling out of his embrace and rubbing her eyes for a long time, pressing the heels of her palms into her eyeballs, making slow, steady breaths.

“Feel any better?” he asked her anxiously.

She managed to give a watery splutter of a laugh.

“No, and now I’ve got the added embarrassment of crying all over your shoulder and making your robes wet,” she sniffed, trying to attempt some humour.

“Robes dry,” he said quietly, “and don’t be embarrassed, it’s only natural...what goes on between friends, stays between friends, right?”

“Right,” she said flatly, staring at the floor.

“Another cup of tea then?” he asked her.

“No, I better go,” she said painfully, looking towards the fireplace with dread.

“Listen Tonks, how about...” he began hesitantly, “I could come with you?”

“You what?”

"Only if you wanted of course," he added hastily, "Keep you company, say hello to Ted and old Anny?"

"You want to come?" she asked in a shocked voice, broken out of her mood by the unexpectedness of the offer.

"If you don't mind?" he asked, slightly unsure of her reaction.

"I'd...I'd love for you to come," she said truthfully, taken aback.

"Good, well, shall we go?" he asked, coming over business-like all of a sudden.

"Yeah," she said vaguely, staring at him in a whole new light.

He helped her to her feet and led the way to the fireplace. With a flick she shrunk the trunk and placed it in her pocket, shortly followed by the kitchen box and gave the apartment one last look. With a sigh she pulled out a pouch of powder, gave one last sniff and stepped into the flames.

"The Heathers."

Harry stepped off the bus, waiting for it roar past before he looked up at the looming edifice of the block of flats, a mass of twinkling lights against a the dark night sky. He stared at it for some time, taken aback at how much it looked like his first view of Hogwarts - out on the lake, in that small boat, looking up to see all those lighted windows...

A car whooshed past down the road, horn blaring, breaking him from his reverie. With a deep sigh he began to trudge towards the building, trying to stop himself wishing it was Hogwarts and wondering where Kitty was. He'd scoured everywhere she'd taken him or talked about since the morning and seen neither hide nor hair of her and he was trying to block out the thought that she'd run away again - surely last nights weird argument-type thing wasn't that bad?

He was jostled roughly by a group of kids wandering past and he glared after them before noticing where they'd just walked past - a small park. Without thinking he pushed open the rusty gate, wandering across the tarmac floor until he stopped by the swings, flopping down onto one of them with another sigh.

He snaked his arm around the chains, barely swinging back and forth with the push of his toe as he stared at the floor, thinking. If Kitty really had left, surely she'd have said goodbye at least? He tried to comfort himself with this thought but couldn't help the treacherous whisper in his mind that Donna hadn't even seen her for two years, not even a phone call.

Great disappearing act he thought glumly, before the voice whispered once more.

About as good as you.

His stomach writhed guiltily as he tried to imagine Hermione and Ron's reaction when they'd found out, how they must have worried, then got angry, how they must hate him now. He gripped the chains of the swing tightly - maybe he should ring Hermione...just to let her know he was still...well, alive for a start.

He saw a movement out of the corner of his eye and he tensed up, looking left slightly to see Kitty sitting on the swing next to him. His happy greeting died in his throat as he saw the carefully arranged blank expression, her tensed jaw and the way her knuckles were white as they gripped the chains.

He turned back to staring straight ahead of him - at least he knew she was still about, still upset with him, but around nevertheless. Harry found himself wondering why she always found it necessary to disappear like she did without a word, whether she really would do it to him one day, if Donna had been right about him being the first person she'd ever trusted. That seemed like a huge responsibility to him and he knew that she was waiting for an explanation, for him to explain all those weird occurrences and plot holes in his life.

The silence stretched out around them until he could take it no longer, hating her anger.

“Sorry about last night.”

There was nothing but the sound of the squeaking chains as the swings creaked backwards and forwards. Harry gulped nervously.

“I didn’t say anything because I don’t trust you ok? Far from it,” he said awkwardly, “it’s just...I’m a bit like you really, I don’t like just being asked to talk about something on demand...”

She still didn’t say anything, but he fancied that she wasn’t stubbornly ignoring him like before, but listening, and waiting.

He gave a slight, nervous laugh, “I’m not very good at explaining myself either...explain my, feelings, and everything.”

“Me too,” she said quietly, feet scuffing at the bark shavings beneath their feet.

“And I realise that for you to trust me is a big thing,” he continued, staring at the floor hard now, “and I trust you, and I will tell you everything, soon.”

She nodded mutely, as he realised what he’d just promised. It was something he could never do, he could never tell Kitty everything, she wouldn’t understand, there was only so much he could lie about and wallpaper over with muggle words before he got lost. But he found that he wanted to tell her, desperately. He wanted her to understand.

“I shouldn’t have pushed you,” she said finally, looking across to him, “I wouldn’t have said anything either if you’d done that to me.”

He nodded mutely.

“And,” she continued, sounding unsure and awkward about herself now, “I know I can’t imagine what...what it’s like to lose family and friends that you care about...the way you did...I just want you to know...that I...”

She trailed off helplessly.

"I know," he supplied, understanding exactly what she was trying to get across, "thanks."

She gave a pleased, yet embarrassed smile, "Good."

He nodded to himself, staring at the ground, unsure of what to do or say next. He had the feeling everything had been resolved for now, but suddenly he felt like he had around Cho most of the time - like he had no clue what was going on with her. He had a sudden flash of panic that him and Kitty would turn into the disaster that he and Cho had been - why was he so bad at the girl thing?

"Hey Thinker," said Kitty, breaking him out of his reverie.

"Huh?"

"How about a tub of ice cream - your choice of flavour, and a video?" she suggested, eyes alight.

And just like that, the old Kitty was back and Harry gave a wide grin.

"Sounds good," he agreed, getting up off the swings with her.

They walked towards the gate to the park and towards the shops.

"Oatmeal and Cookie flavour?" he asked hopefully.

"An American Werewolf in London?" she replied.

He rolled his eyes but couldn't keep a smile off his face. Maybe he wasn't so bad at the girl thing after all.

"Wotcher Princess."

"Daddy."

Tonks was almost instantly pulled into a hug by her beaming father, which she sank into gratefully, hanging on a few seconds longer than normal. She breathed in his familiar smell and closed her eyes as she was transported back to her childhood, back to a better time. As she pulled away, Remus stepped through the fire too and Ted gave one of his booming laughs.

"Now here's a face I haven't seen for a long time!" he chuckled, pumping Remus' hand up and down in a hearty handshake, "Why it's young Remus Lupin, up to mischief!"

"Not so young anymore," replied Remus dryly, brushing his greying hair off his forehead, "how are you Ted?"

"Fine, fine!" he said, giving another laugh and slinging an arm around Tonks' shoulder, "all the better for seeing my little girl!"

"Dad," wheedled Tonks, flushing slightly.

"Come now princess," he admonished happily, "I look forward to you coming round, regale us with stories about all them dark wizards you've got off the streets."

Remus gave a smile at Tonks' discomfort, which was making Ted laugh even more.

"She's such a hard worker," he told Remus, practically bursting with pride, "always on the go, doing things aren't you princess? It's a wonder she has time to breath, let alone come and visit us old fuddy-duddy's!"

"I visit you as often as I can dad," she said, depressed air not seeming to factor in Ted's radar.

Her father merely rolled his eyes theatrically at her.

"How's mum?" she asked anxiously, trying to fix her dad with a serious look.

"She's well," said Ted, possibly lying or merely hopeful, Remus couldn't tell which, "took a tumble yesterday like I said but I patched her up well enough - did a St. John's ambulance course when I was a nipper - but then you won't know what that is, eh Remus?"

"He's not stupid dad," sighed Tonks, even though Remus was about to answer truthfully that he didn't understand, "why did she need patching up?"

"Just a few bumps and scrapes princess," he assured her airily.

"You should have called me sooner," she told him impatiently, "I could have come over straight away!"

"I tried, but they said you were working," he said and Remus saw how Tonks took this, as if she'd let him down somehow.

"What happened?" she asked in a more strangled voice than before, "yesterday?"

"I was just talking to John over the fence when I heard the crash, she knows better than to go wandering off by herself, but you know you're mum!" he said jovially, before adding to Remus in a stage whisper, "Always the same, ever since I met her, crafty little minx, always curious."

Tonks practically had tears in her eyes now and Remus wished her father would stop pretending like everything was normal and give his daughter a bit of comfort.

"Where is she?" Tonks' whispered in a tight voice.

"I popped her in front of the gogglebox, her favourite soaps on after the news," he said, frowning at his daughter slightly.

"I'll just go...see her."

And with that Tonks was gone and Remus watched her go worriedly, before turning back to Ted.

“Fancy a swift half Remus?” he asked, beckoning his into the kitchen.

“That’d be lovely Ted,” he said, emerging into a small, cluttered kitchen.

It was strange, he thought as he looked around the room as Ted got the beers, but the house was almost exactly the same as Tonks’ flat used to look like. A little more clutter, a lot more mess, he smiled slightly as he saw the pile of washing up teetering next to the sink. He guessed that not a lot of magic was used in the house anymore with Andromeda ill and Ted had never been one for housekeeping. Not that he was that able, Ted’s left leg had been stiff and essentially useless for a few years now Tonks’ had told him and he tottered around the house with a cane.

“So Remus, what brings you to our humble abode?” asked Ted, sliding a can over to Remus and seating himself at the table with a heavy sigh.

“I think Tonks needed a bit of moral support,” he said truthfully, wondering how much about his daughter Ted knew, “she’s had a rough month.”

“I know,” he said heavily, and all at once the jovial, joking man deflated and left something more haunted, more weary behind, “poor Sirius, leaving us like that...”

Remus merely nodded, taking a gulp of beer.

“Anny didn’t take that too well,” he sighed, “and well, Nymphadora didn’t take that too well.”

Remus almost forgot that was Tonks’ real name for a second and almost frowned at the unknown name.

“How’s she doing Ted,” he asked seriously, “really?”

“I don’t know to be honest, the doctor says she’s as well as can be expected, but lately...” he gave a sorrowful shrug, “I don’t know. We’re a sorry set of individuals aren’t we Remus? Cursed I say.”



"I know how you feel," he replied, "we've all got our burdens I guess."

"I heard about James' little 'un," nodded Ted, "any sign of him yet?"

"Not yet, but Ton - Nymphadora's working on it."

"She works too much."

Remus looking at him surreptitiously, noting the very odd tone of voice he said that in. Ted however, took a swig of his beer and Remus glanced behind him to see Tonks hovering in the doorway to the lounge still. She was staring at the back of the sofa in which her mother was sitting. For almost a full minute she couldn't build the courage to enter and when she did, it was at a shuffle's pace, trying not to make a sound.

Frightened at what she'd see, she rounded the sofa to find her mother, covered mostly by blanket's, watching the telly with heavy lidded eyes. She didn't notice Tonks at first and she studied her mother's face, which was dominated by a large cut and bruise her father had inexpertly patched with a mass of small plasters.

"Hello mum," she whispered finally, crouching down in front of the woman.

Slowly she looked away from the telly and stared at her for a long moment. Tonks held her breath, silently begging her to be able to recognise her.

"Oh hello dear," came the final reply, warm and familiar, just like always.

"Mum," Tonks said, close to tears with relief, "how are you?"

"Fine...a little cold dear," she replied, tugging slightly at the blankets.

"Here, let me mum," she sniffed, tucking the blankets around her and performing a quick heating charm on them.

The woman nodded thankfully, and closed her eyes for a few moments, as if to savour the feeling. Tonks nearly grinned at the sight, smoothing down the greying hair and trying to stop the tears. Then Andromeda opened her eyes, looking at Tonks suddenly as if for the first time.

“Are you here from the hospital?” she asked curiously.

“What?” whispered Tonks, her heart constricting suddenly.

“There’s no need for you dear, I told Ted I didn’t need a doctor,” she said sympathetically, patting Tonks hand, “you’ve had a wasted trip.”

“No mum, it’s me...” choked out Tonks, “Tonks...Nymphadora...your daughter?”

She frowned at Tonks suspiciously, who began to cry quietly to herself.

“Now really,” said the woman, giving a sniff and looking away from Tonks as if embarrassed, “I don’t think there’s any call for that...”

“I’m your daughter,” whispered Tonks almost to herself, “me...”

The woman stared at her with wide, black eyes for a few moments, seemingly entranced by the sight of the apparent stranger with her crying. Then she leant back and looked towards the kitchen.

“Ted!” she cried loudly.

In a few moments her father was walking in, trailed by Remus who immediately walked over to Tonks, who had sat on the floor, face in hands. Ted merely sighed and walked over to the older woman, who looked unnerved and shaken now.

“This girl says she’s Nymphadora,” she said accusingly as Remus bent down to Tonks, laying a hand on her shoulder.

“That’s because she is, honey,” soothed Ted, rearranging her blankets carefully and handing her a glass of water.

“But Nymphadora’s upstairs playing with Caelum!”

The glass slipped out of Ted’s hands, shattering on the wooden floor as everyone looked over to the woman. Tension crackled in the air and Remus looked down to see Tonks had stopped crying in shock, face chalk white.

“N-now dear,” trembled Ted, trying to cover up his shock, “you know that’s not true.”

“It is,” said the woman irately, flicking from emotion to emotion with such speed Remus couldn’t keep up, “I heard him a few minutes ago!”

Tonks gave a choked sob and Remus looked over to Ted worriedly; he seemed almost as pale as Tonks.

“You must have been mistaken dear,” said Ted, clearly shaken, “Caelum isn’t here. Now, how about another glass of water - or tea! Who’d like tea?”

“Dad!” cried Tonks angrily, brushing away her tears furiously.

“Sorry princess,” he apologised, pulling a stool over and sitting down heavily.

Andromeda looked from one to the other in confusion before her gaze settled on Remus.

“Are you from the hospital too?” she accused, “Ted, you didn’t call someone else did you?”

“No he’s here with Nymphadora,” he said, brushing his wife’s hair back slowly, “you remember Remus don’t you, friends with little Sirius?”

“Sirius,” mused the woman quietly, looking about her for inspiration, “I think I...but he’s in prison now!”

“Not anymore,” assured Remus, causing Tonks to give another dry sob.

“Good...but why’s he here?” she repeated, looking at him suspiciously again, “not another doctor Ted.”

“No he’s here with-” began Ted patiently, before Tonks cut in.

“Forget it dad,” she cautioned, rubbing her face once more.

“Are you here from the hospital?” asked Andromeda once again.

This time Tonks was ready, and with a brave smile she looked at her mother and nodded.

“Yes, I’m here to fix you up.”

And with that she pulled out her wand and began to peel away Ted’s plasters and bandages and Remus watched in silence as Tonks pretended she didn’t know her mother. He couldn’t help but feel desperately sorry for her, trying to imagine what was going on in her head behind the mask her mother had forced her to wear, how she could bear the sorrow of it all.

Carefully Tonks pulled the plaster off her mother’s forehead and Remus watched as she tenderly banished the cut, healed the bruising and carefully smoothed down her hair. Ted was watching her, old pride shining in his eyes and Remus suddenly felt like he was intruding, like he had no right to be witnessing this family’s trauma. He had come for Tonks, but now he felt like she’d have been much better off without him here.

“All done,” said Tonks finally and Ted gave her a small kiss on the forehead.

“Cup of tea now?” he asked everyone.

Everyone nodded and he disappeared into the kitchen, leaving the three alone in the room, covered with the noise of the telly. Andromeda seemed much happier now she understood Tonks’ role

as 'doctor' and picked up the remote, turning the volume of the telly up.

"Did you hear they caught that terrible man?" she asked the world in general.

"What terrible man mu- Andromeda?" asked Tonks painfully.

Remus gave her hand a brief squeeze of support.

"Why the muggle of course," she told them, rolling her eyes, "it was on our local news."

"I don't watch the news," she replied dispassionately.

"Oh, horrible man," she continued, seemingly oblivious, "with the muggle potions...you know the drugs."

"Yeah?" Tonks asked, not caring at all, "Well, he's caught now."

"Too late for his poor daughter though," Andromeda said sadly, shaking her head, "you know if they say missing they really mean she's long dead...poor girl."

Remus wanted to shake his head at the sorry charade, if it wasn't all so tragic it would have been funny.

"Tea's up," announced Ted, wandering back in with a tray.

"Look, here it is," Andromeda said excitedly, turning the volume up so loud that everyone winced.

"Police are today celebrating the closure of one of North Surrey's biggest drug syndicates today with the successful capture of one of the ringleaders, Ian Banks..."

"Tea Remus!" shouted Ted above the din as he passed him a cup, "here's the sugar!"

Banks, who's flat in Crawley was raided late last night, was found to contain a wide variety of illegal drugs as well as firearms and other homemade weapons.

"Pass this to Nymphadora!" yelled Ted even louder as he handed Remus another cup.

"Tonks!" shouted Remus.

But she wasn't listening, Tonks was staring avidly at the telly screen, looking as if she'd just seen a ghost.

However, fears are growing this evening as to the whereabouts of his sixteen year old step-daughter, Catherine Earl...

Remus dropped the cup with a crash as he recognised the name, staring at the photo of the girl as it flashed onto the screen.

...reported missing by neighbours of Banks after what has been termed a violent argument at the flat in the early hours of Sunday morning.

Remus looked across to Tonks, who could do nothing but mouth in shock right back at him.

The argument was thought to have become physical, with neighbours describing noises of yelling and smashing glass. Catherine, who has been living with her step-father since he was released from prison six months ago for grievous bodily harm and who also holds a criminal record, has not been seen since the argument and police are concerned for her safety.

Anyone with any information on the missing girl is advised to contact Surrey County Police on...

"Remus..." spluttered Tonks in shock, "did you hear that...?"

"I..." he began, lost for words, "we have to go and tell them about this..."

Harry dropped the shopping around his ankles and searched his pockets for the key to the flat that Kitty had given him earlier, he'd tried knocking but either no one was at home or they couldn't hear him over the pounding music. He was tempted to go for the latter as the music sounded suspiciously like her favourite band, despite the fact they'd been told on three separate occasions to keep the noise down - did she want someone to report them? Find them?

Finally he located the keys and fumbled around in the lock for a moment before letting the door swing open. He was instantly greeted by a wall of sound and the lingering smell of something burning from the kitchen.

"Kitty!" he yelled as he slammed the door shut, stumbling at once in the dim light of the corridor over his shopping bags.

No reply save for the swelling, thumping beat of the music.

"Merlin's sake," he muttered under his breath, grasping the bags and walking into the lounge.

He was greeted by the sight of Kitty, completely oblivious to his return, vacuum in hand, dancing around like a wild woman. Despite his previous annoyance, he grinned to himself, dropping his shopping and watching as she, eyes closed and holding an imaginary microphone, yelled along to the song as she repeatedly rammed the Hoover into the bottom of the sofa. Only a very small patch of the carpet looked clean suggesting to Harry she'd been quite sidetracked from her task.

He leant against the doorframe, arms folded, ready to see how long it took her to realise he was there, laughing as she spun around the Hoover in a half-decent attempt at the tango. For a brief moment he realised all over again why he was here, why he didn't want to leave.

"Lola...la la lo la..." she whooped, spinning madly and picking something off the table that made his grin lessen slightly.

A vodka bottle.

"Tastes like cherry co-la, oh la la lo la!" she continued, before taking a deep swig, making her usual sour face and continuing to dance.

He tried not to feel disappointed for some reason but failed and he was just about to say something to her when she gave a spin, wobbled slightly, opened her eyes and saw him.

"Harry!" she shouted happily over the music, abandoning the vodka bottle and galloping over.

She practically jumped into his arms, massive grin on her face as she gave him a quick kiss.

"Been keeping busy I see?" he said dryly, as she landed back on her feet.

"Essential maintenance," she laughed, before wrapping her arms around his neck and leaning against him, "anywho, I've been waiting for you to come back for ages!"

"I'm touched," he smirked, "but it's three in the afternoon and you're already drinking?"

"I've past drinking and am onto drunk!" she giggled exuberantly, "And you will be too soon I bet!"

"Too early for me," he said, not able to stay annoyed at her in the face of her happiness.

"Not when you hear my amazing, fabulous, utterly awe-inspiring news!" she grinned, dragging him by the hand over to the table and picking up the bottle.

"What fabulous, amazing, awe-inspiring news?" he said wearily as she took another deep swig.

"Guess!" she said deliciously, bounded away and dancing across the room in a most random way.



"You managed to cook a meal that didn't explode or taste of charcoal?" he joked.

"Haha very funny!" she yelled from the kitchen, before twirling and shimmying back into the room, "but nope, surely the lingering burnt smell must have told you how well the bacon went earlier?"

"True," he acknowledged, "stop still a second will you, I'm getting dizzy just watching you!"

She stopped spinning in a circle, tumbled slightly and fell against the wall with a giggle. However, this didn't seem to faze her and soon she was back jiving across the room, grabbing his resisting hands and pulling him to his feet.

"C'mon Harry, dance," she pleaded, still laughing as she twirled him about.

"What's got you in such a good mood?" he asked, curious now.

She grinned widely, "I heard from a friend from Surrey a few hours back," she said, pausing for suspense.

"And...?" prompted Harry.

"And guess whose step-father just got busted for possessing and supplying cocaine?"

Harry's mouth dropped open.

"Mine, that's who!" she cried happily, spinning around the stunned Harry and grabbing the vodka again.

"Are you serious?" he asked in disbelief after a few moments.

"As I'll ever be!"

"But that's...that's fantastic!" he said, unable to quite comprehend what this meant, "Right?"

“Right!” she squeaked, leaning forward and giving him a long, lingering kiss.

“And do you know what the best part is?” she asked him breathlessly when she pulled away, “Apart from him being locked up for years and years and years? No more step-dad, no more worrying about him chasing after us - I’m free - we’re free!”

“Free?” he repeatedly dumbly.

“Free!” she whooped, doing a crazy spin and losing her balance slightly, only stopped from falling over by Harry grabbing her around the waist.

“You know what?” he asked her finally.

“What?”

“You were right, I am going to get drunk,” he laughed, grabbing the bottle off her and taking a throat burning swig.

“Too right!” she agreed as she finally managed to coax Harry into a spin around the makeshift dance floor.

All was going well until she tripped on the Hoover wire and fell into a heap on the sofa. Laughing uncontrollably, Kitty managed to manoeuvre herself until she was more or less lying on Harry’s front.

“Do you know what this calls for?” she asked him when she’d finally calmed down.

“Burnt bacon sandwiches?” he asked innocently.

“No,” she said, swatting his arm playfully, “we should go out tonight! Dancing - to a club? We could go with Donna and some old friends? How about it? Please, can we Harry?”

Part of him was giggling that she might be free of her pursuers, but he wasn’t, but one look at her face, glowing with anticipation, made his answer die in his throat.

"You're going to say yes aren't you?" she said, sounding impossibly excited, "please please pleaseeeee?"

"Alright alright," he laughing, "begging is so unbecoming of you."

"You gave in remarkably easy then," she said leaning back and squinting at him suspiciously.

"I'm finding it hard to concentrate with a beautiful girl lying on top of me," he joked sweetly.

"And now he's trying to compliment me, this is curious," she continued to the world in general in a Private Detective sort of voice, "methinks you might actually want to strut you're funky stuff?"

"Please," he said, rolling his eyes, "me and dancing do not go together, trust me."

"Nah, I bet you like Jekyll and Hyde," she said, "by day, mild mannered runaway, by night - a dancing demon!"

"No, trust me on this," he laughed, "I have no hidden talents when it comes to dancing."

"Well, don't you worry my young apprentice, where I'm thinking of going you don't really need to dance per se."

"Where are you thinking of going?" he asked her curiously as she placed her chin on his chest.

"Its called The Underground," she told him, glimmer of mischief in her eyes.

"Like the London trains?" he asked and she gave a pleased nod, "and why don't I need to be able to dance particularly well?"

"Because it's not that kind of music," she said airily, before leaning closer to him, "enough of this small talk anyway, time for you to have your wicked way with me."

"It sort of ruins it if you have to tell me to do it, doesn't it?" he laughed, wrapping his arms around her waist nonetheless.

"Hush, we'll edit that part out later," she whispered in a conspiratorial tone, "no-one'll know."

He rolled his eyes at her, there was nothing more amusing than Kitty drunk, except possibly him and Kitty being drunk together. He wondered vaguely what The Underground actually was, before he was sidetracked by having his wicked-way with her, which consisted of one long kiss before Donna chose to return.

"Christ," he heard her say as she walked into the lounge, "I should really learn to knock in case I stumble into a low budget porn movie in my own living room."

"Harry's ravishing me!" quipped Kitty, sliding off him and searching for the bottle again, giggling at her own joke

"Not from where I'm standing honey," sighed Donna, "unless you crazy cats do it differently in Surrey."

Harry gave a slightly embarrassed laugh, sitting up and trying, slightly foolishly really, to tame his hair.

"Hey, have I got a nugget of news that doesn't really affect you in any way yet will be the cause of celebration for tonight?" said Kitty, impervious to any sort of embarrassment.

"You two are running away to Gretna Green to get married?" she said dryly and Harry nearly choked on the vodka he just tried to down.

"Not exactly, but good idea, Harry write that in your diary," said Kitty in mock-seriousness, "but nope, completely wrong - it's not quite as good as going to Alton Towers, but better than winning a tenner on the lottery."

“Wow, that’s a vague, slightly strange range,” she replied, picking Harry’s shopping off the floor and walking it to the kitchen, “you’ve decided to pay me rent?”

“Wrong again, man you’re crap at this game!” said Kitty, good mood unable to be dented by Donna’s disarming sarcasm, “my step-dad got caught supplying and is going down, down, downwwwn to China Town.”

“You kidding?” she said, actually looking impressed, “wow, that’s fantastic news - definitely better than winning a tenner on the lottery.”

“Exactly, so I figured, how about The Underground?”

“What, tonight?” asked Donna, eyebrows rising.

“Strike while the irons hot,” supplied Kitty, bouncing on the balls of her feet.

“Are you sure it’s a good idea, remember what happened on The Night of the Bailey’s?” reminded Donna ominously.

“Vaguely,” she said, waving it off, “come on, it’ll be a laugh - Harry ‘disco-king’ Potter here’ll be going, he’s promised to show us how it’s done.”

Harry merely threw a well-aimed pillow at her before turning to Donna, “I’m only going to make sure she doesn’t do something I’ll regret.”

“Sensible,” nodded Donna before giving Kitty a thoughtful look, “The Underground, are you sure?”

“Yeah, come on chuck! This’ll be fan-tabu-low-so!”

Donna grinned and looked at Harry for a few moments.

“I haven’t been on a real bender in ages, and mom can look after Jase...”

“All sorted then?” asked Kitty happily.

"Yeah, it'll do us all good," she said with a smile, "and plus, Harry gets to see the real Caz..."

"She means Kitty 'disco-queen' Earl," she proclaimed, doing a little spin.

Harry laughed along with her and then caught sight of the look on Donna's face, causing him to falter slightly. He remembered their argument when they'd first arrived and the odd feeling he got off her sometimes - when she said the 'real Caz' he thought she meant something quite different, and in a small way, this worried him.

Later that night, Remus and Tonks had stopped off at a nearby pub, the Wand and Sceptre, for a pick-me-up drink after their hard day. It had been Remus' idea, Tonks didn't seem to want to go back to her empty flat and he had soon realised that she was a lot more upset than she'd let her father know when she left the house. In the rush they'd been in to tell the Order what they'd seen on the muggle news, he hadn't had time to fully understand what had happened at Tonks' home, but now he couldn't seem to think of anything else. He looked across to see her staring glumly at the table, chin cradled in her hand.

"Tonks?" asked Remus, slightly hesitantly, "can I ask you a question?"

"You just did," she pointed out in a flat voice, before giving him a look, "go ahead."

"I just wondered," he began, wondering if this was something he should get into, "who Caelum is?"

Tonks gave a slight start and spent a few seconds loner than necessary in picking up her drink and taking a swig. When she finally answered, it was in a hollow voice as she stared at the wood grain of the table.

"My brother."

Remus stared at her in shock. Her brother? She had a brother? He'd never heard of him, seen him, she'd never spoken to him about having a brother before. She was an only child, everyone knew that...

"Your...brother?" he repeated slowly.

She nodded heavily and took another deep swig of her drink, nearly draining her glass.

"Brother?" he repeated, just to make sure he'd heard her right.

"Five years younger than me," she told him her voice void of emotion now, "he was born when we were in hiding, no one ever knew about him here because my parents wanted to keep him a secret from the family. You know how they took their marriage, and me being born..."

Remus couldn't find anything to say for a moment, and could only nod continuously as if to encourage her to continue the story.

"We were best friends we were younger, he was the sporty one and I was the clever one apparently. Odd to think now hey?" she asked with a slight laugh that seemed totally out of place in this conversation, "He wanted to be a Quidditch player when he was older...for the Magpies..."

"Your favourite Quidditch team," Remus added, unable to say anything more intelligent.

"That's why they're my favourite team," she said with a crooked smile, "we had season tickets to them, badges, scarves, robes, everything."

"Where is he?" asked Remus suddenly, regaining the use of his voice again.

She gave him a confused look, cocking her head onto one side as if she didn't understand his question.

"He's dead."

"Oh..." was all he could seem to get out, "I'm so sorry."

She gave a shrug, waving at the barman for another drink. Remus watched her glum features for a long moment, Ted's words of their family curse echoing in his head.

"What happened?" he finally asked.

"He fell off his broom when we were playing in the back garden," she said in a flat voice as if the story had no connection to her, "broke his neck when he hit the floor, died instantly they said."

"I had no idea..." said Remus heavily, "but that's...that's terrible."

"It was," she said, shrugging again, "But I was only 11 at the time. I was starting school in less than a month and he was upset he wouldn't get to play with me anymore. He wanted to play Quidditch, like he always did, so we went out to the garden."

She drew in a shaky breath, and continued her story, voice almost monotone as she stared off into the distance.

"We weren't meant to play on our own, I knew we weren't supposed to, but how do you stop him? He wanted to be a seeker you know, tried to do a stupid trick. He must have known it wouldn't work, but he never had any fear of flying. It happened so quickly, one minute he was there, the next not. I never really understood it, still don't."

"I can't imagine what that must have been like," Remus consoled, watching as she shrugged and took another swig of her drink.

"Pretty crap really," she tried to joke, humour failing miserably at its attempt to enter to her voice, "but you know, that's life right? Pretty crap really."

"Tonks," he sighed, even though he felt she probably had a pretty good reason to think that.

"What, that's not true?" she demanded, slightly angrily, "a six year old boy can die just like that? A perfectly healthy, good woman goes stir-crazy from a hereditary disease which completely bypasses the scum



she has for sisters? A perfectly good honest man spends most of his life locked away, only to be murdered when the first sign of freedom comes along? Locked up, like an animal - for nothing! Where's the sense in that?"

"There isn't any," he conceded, watching as she drummed her short nails on the table in agitation.

"There's no reason is there? No reason why people like my mum and my brother waste away and die, and the filth that are locked up in Azkaban live to ripe old ages, people like the my aunt Narcissus are rich and wealthy and my parents have to scrape by on peanuts! Sirius paid for the crimes of others while they live long, free lives!"

"They may be rich, or have long lives, but look at the price they have to pay," he said quietly, "being a lapdog to Voldemort, a murderer, torturer, traitor? I'd rather be poor and go out with a bang than have to live with that evil, wouldn't you?"

"You sound like Sirius," she muttered mutinously, "he must have loved going out with a bang..."

"He rubs off on you like that," Remus said, tending to his own, forgotten drink, "he understood the sacrifices you had to make for your loved ones."

"Yeah well it stinks," she said vehemently, eyes blazing, "there's no justice in the world is there? No benefit to standing up against the dark is there?"

"You're an Auror Tonks," he reminded her in a low voice, leaning towards her earnestly, "you are justice, you make things better - you make them pay, right?"

She stared at her glass for a second before looking up into his eyes and finding only conviction there.

"Right?" he prompted.

She bowed her head.

“Right.”

“That’s why you chose this job right, why you spend your life protecting people, punishing people, guarding people - Right?”

“Right.”

He gave a frown at her disheartened tone, sounding as if she didn’t believe a word he was saying, like she truly believed she didn’t matter, didn’t make a difference.

“It’s going to be ok Tonks,” he told her, he wasn’t quite sure why, or to what he was referring.

She looked up at him again, staring into his eyes for a long time as she tried to figure something out.

“Do you think?”

“Yes,” he said firmly, wondering why he was making promises he probably couldn’t keep, “one day.”

She gave a sigh, placing a hand across her eyes for a long time, perhaps from the drink, but probably from the mood she was in. Remus sat back and watched her, finishing off his own drink and thinking about what she said.

Eventually she straightened up, picking up her glass and trying to take a gulp before she realised it was empty and gave an annoyed frown. Without a word she climbed to her feet and tottered over to the bar and Remus felt his spirits sink a little lower. He was so used to seeing Tonks cheerful and being infected by her undentable sunny disposition that to see her sad or depressed seemed to make him feel a little unnerved.

“Haven’t you got work tomorrow?” he asked as she sat back down, uncorking the bottle of Firewhiskey she’d just bought.

“I’ve always got work tomorrow,” she muttered.

"I mean, should you really be drinking anymore?" he rephrased as she poured a generous amount into her glass.

She either didn't hear him or pretending not to because she merely began to drink in silence, staring at the table.

"Tonks?"

"What?" she demanded angrily, slamming the glass down so that a little of the amber liquid sloshed over the sides.

"You don't need to drink anymore," he told her flatly.

"Says you, king of self-control!" she snapped, "I think I've deserved a few drinks after the day I've had, ok?"

Remus stared into her bloodshot, angry eyes for a few seconds before standing up and grabbing the bottle by the neck.

"Oi!" she exclaimed furiously, jumping to her feet as Remus headed to the bar.

"We don't need anymore, thank you," Remus told the barman, handing back the bottle as Tonks grabbed the back of his robes.

"What do you think you're doing? I paid for that!" she fumed, trying to make a swipe for the bottle the barman had just picked up.

"You had enough already," he told her steadily, "I'm taking you home."

"Pot and kettle Remus!" she practically yelled, "I never stopped you!"

"Well maybe you should have," he replied evenly as she glared at him.

If looks could kill...

"You can't tell me what to do!" she stormed, "if you don't want to be here then go home, don't ruin my night!"

"Are you having a good time?" he snapped back at her suddenly, before retreating slightly in surprise at himself.

"No!" she hissed, grabbing her cloak and storming towards the fire.

"Maybe it's the company," she tossed back over her shoulder.

"Tonks," he sighed wearily, following her quickly.

"No, you're right! Why on earth should I try and make myself feel any better! I should be more like you and mope around in self-depreciation, binging in secret with no-one to share it with or tell you how much of a fool you are!"

Tonks, face contorted with drunken rage threw the handful of floor powder in the general direction of the fire, yelled the name of her new home and stumbled into the fire without another word.

Remus was left standing in front of the fire, staring after her with a look of deepest hurt briefly flitting across his features. He glanced towards the bar, eyes lingering on the bottle Tonks had bought for a good deal of time before his features hardened and he turned away.

"12, Grimauld Place," he muttered, stepping into the emerald flames. Harry was sat on the edge of the bath in Donna's flat, watching silently as Kitty put her makeup on in the bathroom mirror. She was impossibly excited at the prospect of going out for the night, and even more so at the fate of her stepfather but Harry just couldn't seem to find himself sharing her enthusiasm. He had a very bad feeling about the night and he couldn't put his finger on why - was he worried he'd be recognised, or that something would happen to Kitty? Maybe he was just worried by Donna's words earlier, he'd known she'd been harbouring some secret feelings towards Kitty and more vocal ones towards him, but he'd always tried to not let her bother him.

Why was tonight different?

"Too much eyeshadow?" she asked suddenly, turning to face him, one eye ringed with black, the other left unpainted.

"Looks ok," he shrugged and she turned back to the mirror, squinting at herself.

He watched her, only half paying attention as he tested his feelings - was he worried Kitty would do something? What could she possibly do? Maybe he was worried what Donna would do...

"Can you chuck me my mascara?" she asked, motioning to her makeup bag that was clasped in his hands.

"Here."

Maybe it was just him...maybe all these dreams he'd been having had made him paranoid? He felt like leaving the house would be a big mistake. For some reason Quibells letter floated into his mind and he felt a sickening jolt in his stomach - Sirius could be in some kind of limbo, waiting for him, and he was here...

"Too much?" Kitty asked again, showing him her face again.

"Does it matter?" he asked in a distant voice.

Sirius would be so angry to find out he was contemplating muggle makeup instead of finding a way to save him...He was so busy with his thoughts that he didn't even notice that Kitty hadn't snapped back at him with a retort, which she so often did when he was off with her. In fact it was several minutes before he realised she was completely silent and he looked over to her.

She had been staring at her reflection for some time, makeup finished a while back. Harry frowned slightly, wondering what was up.

"What are you looking at?" he asked finally.

She gave a sigh and dropped the mascara wand into the sink with a clatter and turned to face him. She had a strange look on her face, one he'd never seen before and highlighted by the fact her features

were heavily made up. All the black makeup gave her the look of a gothic vampire.

“What’s wrong?” he frowned.

“I could ask you the same thing,” she said, sitting down on the toilet seat lid.

He felt a little unbalanced by her sudden change in behaviour, Kitty liked loud confrontations, but now she just sounded...resigned.

“I’m fine,” he said blankly, “I’m no good at this makeup thing.”

“I’m not talking about that,” she said clasping her hands together and studying her nails intently.

“Then what are you talking about?”

She seemed to think about this for a long moment, nodding to herself as if making up her mind.

“It’s just...I thought you’d be happy for me.”

Harry didn’t really understand what she meant by this so he gave her an uncertain look.

“And you just proved that you’re not,” she sighed in disappointment, “you don’t even know what I’m talking about, do you?”

He didn’t want to say no at this point as he thought it really wouldn’t help his situation so he tried to wipe the frown of puzzlement off his face.

“I’m sorry, I’ve been miles away all night,” he began, fixing her with a focused look, “I-”

“Yeah, it’s always about you, isn’t it Harry?” she asked him sarcastically.

“What do you mean?” he asked indignantly, trying to defend himself before she cut across him again.

“Do you know how long I’ve been waiting for this day?” she asked him in a tight voice, “How long I’ve been begging and praying for him to be out of my life forever?”

She was talking about her stepfather, he realised suddenly and he cursed himself - talk about insensitivity on his part.

“Oh Kitty...I’m so sorry,” he began, climbing to his feet.

“Glad we’re on the same wavelength now,” she said, turning away from him.

“I’m sorry,” he repeated, crouching down beside her and trying to catch her eye.

“I know,” she said in a hollow voice, before something inside her seemed to snap and turned to him with an angry glare, “No, you know what? I don’t think you are actually! You’re so stuck in your own little world Harry! I surprised you’ve managed to surface enough to see I’m upset!”

“Kitty,” Harry said desperately, feeling terrible, “I’m so sorry...I was just thinking about stuff...”

She nodded heavily avoiding his eyes.

“Other people have stuff to think about too Harry,” she told him.

“I know,” he said quickly, “I just have a bad feeling about tonight...”

“What, because I might actually have fun?” she demanded, pushing his hands off her knees, “What are you worried about? That I’m going to do something?”

“No!” he said emphatically, “Definitely not! I was just being stupid, as usual right?”

His attempt at a joke seemed to trail off into the air, but he fancied she was calmed slightly.

“Listen,” he said seriously, placing his hands on her knees again, “I know I can be a completely self-involved, and that maybe I don’t look after you as well as I should, but I’ll try harder ok?”

She didn’t say anything, but didn’t shrug away his hands this time.

“You’ve got permission to slap some sense into me if you want?” he tried and he fancied he could see a small smile cross her lips.

“I just want to feel like you care Harry,” she told him, looking up into his eyes now for the first time, “this is such a big thing to happen...and I don’t know how I feel about it all...and it’s so hard...and all you can do is sit there worrying and not even seeing me.”

“I do care,” he told her, reaching up and tucking a fallen braid behind her ear, “I do see you...”

“No you don’t, you just asked me if it mattered if I had makeup on,” she pointed out, “you haven’t even noticed I bought a new top - you don’t even care that I’m making all this effort for you.”

“I do,” he said earnestly, “you look gorgeous.”

She gave small, humourless laugh, “You have to say that now.”

“I mean it,” he told her seriously, catching her gaze and staring into her eyes, “you look beautiful.”

He leant forward and gave her a light kiss and she gave a weak smile. Harry smiled back, realising fully for the first time that he was telling the absolute truth, that she was the most beautiful person he’d ever seen. This thought seemed to spurn him into action, completely bypassing commands from his brain as he leant forward again and gave her a long, slow kiss.



The thought that she might even be slightly unhappy with him made his stomach writhe guilty and as she leant closer to him he fully appreciated for the first time how much she meant to him, what she made him feel. He smiled against the kiss for a moment before it became deeper and longer, Kitty seemingly forgetting their argument as she ran her cold fingertips down his cheek. Spine tingling and feeling like all his senses had suddenly been sharpened ten fold Harry continued to kiss Kitty until his head started to swim.

“Harry, come on, air,” she gasped, breaking away.

“Nope,” he grinned, giving her another quick kiss and mumbling into her lips, “you’re staying here with me.”

She pulled back again, laughing slightly as he ran his fingers up the back of her neck, leaning forward and kissing her again.

“You can’t keep me here,” she murmured, feeling quite light headed now.

“Want a bet?” he replied in a whisper as she gave a small shiver of pleasure.

“Do you want me to pass out?” she asked him breathlessly, finally managing to pull away and fixing him with an amazed look.

Since when did Harry act like that?

“Get your breath back then,” he laughed in a low voice, leaning forward and kissing her neck.

Kitty giggled uncharacteristically.

“Ok, ok,” she laughed a little breathlessly, “so you’ve proved you like me.”

Harry grinned, brushing her braids away from her face slowly and studying her face intently.

"I'm sorry I've been so detached lately," he told her honestly, "but I'm going to try harder, I'm trying to convince myself I'm not going mad."

"You're not going mad Harry," she said with a soft laugh, "why would you say that?"

"Nightmares?" he suggested, thinking to the nightly visitations of Sirius and Voldemort.

"Everyone gets nightmares Harry," she told him, this time brushing his fringe off his head slightly.

"Not like these they don't," he couldn't help but say and she gave him a frown of puzzlement.

"What do you mean by that?"

For a second he actually considered telling her that his dreams were real, that he could see Voldemort (Riddle to her), that Sirius was haunting him...but then he merely looked into her eyes and saw the worry that had replaced the excitement she'd previously held and he realised he'd done it again.

She was right, he really did think the world revolved around him.

"Nothing," he told her with a wide smile, "let's just get ready to go yeah? This is your night."

She looked slightly puzzled but then gave a wide, grateful smile. She leant forward and placed her warm lips against the lightning bolt scar on his forehead.

"Thanks Harry."

AN/ So i'm battling at the moment with my comp which doesn't seem to like uploading scene breaks int my stories!

And also, if you've noticed a mysterious 'Charlie' appearing in Harry's text, that was Donna's previous name in the sotry and i haven't managed to find/change them all yet!

## Chapter Eleven

But my dreams,  
They aren't as empty,  
As my conscience seems to be.

Harry sat staring at the coffee table, blank, gormless expression on his face as he tried to remember the last time he'd felt so ill for a reason not associated with his scar of Voldemort. His head literally felt like it was about to explode and his stomach was churning and making gurgling noises that sounded none too pleasant. And he was so thirsty he thought his tongue had been replaced with a large lump of mouldy carpet.

Kitty wandered in, last nights make-up smudged around her eyes and her hair looking even more wild than usual. She took one look at Harry, began to laugh and without another word walked into the kitchen. He felt too ill to speak right at that moment and simply sat, careful not to make any sudden, jarring movement, as he waited for her to come back.

A moment later Kitty wandered back in, looked at Harry and laughed again.

"Hair of the dog?" she asked him, showing him a vodka bottle, "or vitamin C burst?"

"Orange juice, please," he said hastily as his stomach lurched at the sight of alcohol.

She tipped him out a glass, handed it to him but held it slightly out of reach. Instead she grinned widely at him and began to laugh again.

"Will you stop doing that!" he told her in exasperation, leaning forward and taking the juice quickly.

Kitty tried to compose her face into a look of innocence, failed miserably and then tried not to laugh by biting her lip. He gave her an experimental glare and she broke down into wild laughter again,

draped over the sofa as he merely sat and watched her in the most dignified silence he could manage.

“Kitty!” he asked her finally, “it’s not that funny!”

She giggled slightly and tried to appear more demure, finally sitting up and lighting up a cigarette. However she kept shooting him looks out of the corner of her eye and smiling to herself.

“You’ve got a right shiner,” she said finally, trying desperately not to laugh.

“Yeah, thanks, I had noticed,” he told her, fingers gingerly prodding his sore and swollen eye.

“Does it hurt?” she asked him conversationally, pouring a healthy dose of vodka into her orange juice that made Harry’s stomach lurch just at the thought.

Harry gave her a Look.

“Ah, enough said. I’ve had black eyes before, I can probably guess,” she said happily, holding up her hands in peace.

Kitty could only hold her silence for a moment before her uncharacteristic early morning exuberance got the better of her and she jumped up. She raised her fists and began to shadow box thin air, ducking and diving, all the time keeping up commentary.

“Fear my fists! For I am the mighty Harry Potter!” she cried, feigning a punch at him, “By day mild mannered runaway, but at night and under the influence? Raging bull, fists of fury!”

She gave a whoop and did a bit of fancy footwork that made Harry forget his disapproving air and began to laugh along with her.

“Who’d have thought you had it in you Harry?” she asked him happily, dropping onto the sofa next to him, “And I thought you twatting my stepdad was a one off!”

He grinned sheepishly and she gave another loud whoop of approval, jumping to her feet once again, full of energy.

“Tell me sir!” she demanded, shoving an invisible microphone in front of him, “Where did your new found skill in ass-kicking come from?”

“I’m quite able to defend myself, you know,” Harry said blushing in embarrassment.

“I seem to recall that you were the one doing the attacking actually,” she said airily, falling onto the sofa stomach first, “nasty temper you’ve got there Harry, gonna get you into trouble.”

He began to laugh along with her and she practically beamed.

“Why are you so happy about it?” he asked her in a puzzled voice.

She merely shuffled along the sofa and rested her elbows on his legs as she grinned up at him.

“Because nobody has ever defended my honour before,” she said simply, leaning up and catching a surprised Harry with a quick kiss.

“You make it sounds so chivalrous,” he joked when they broke apart, though secretly quite pleased at her praise.

“Well it was!” she told he, turning over so she lay with her head on his lap, looking up at him, “my knight in shining armour! Although, I must say, I was quite able to deal with him myself.”

“You shouldn’t have to deal with gits like that,” he said at once, flaring up into anger, “hands all over you like your public property or something-”

He realised he was working himself up into a rant and trailed off to find Kitty staring at him, small smile on her face and a very strange look in her eyes. He interpreted this as a bad sign.

“I’m sorry I got us kicked out of the club,” he apologised finally, “it was a really good night before that.”

“Harry, you could do that every single time we go out from now until the apocalypse and I wouldn’t be angry at you,” she told him emphatically and he looked at her in surprise.

“You look like your angry?” he suggested warily.

“I’m not,” she laughed, although that strange look was still in her eyes, “it’s just...I can’t believe you did that...for me...”

“What, that I was trying to protect you from a bunch of drunken yobs?” he asked her incredulously.

“Yeah,” she said quietly, reaching up and brushing her fingers across his bruised nose and cheekbones, “it really meant a lot me.”

He gave a small smile before wincing suddenly when her fingers trailed over a particularly painful area. She gave an upset looking frown but he merely brushed away her worry with another grin.

“Am I ever going to see what you look like without injuries?” she sighed finally, “you’re jaws only just gone down after that fight with my stepdad and now you look like a panda!”

“We can’t all heal as fast as you,” he joked, thinking about the time he’d regrown all the bones in one arm overnight, “you’re eyes went down after a few days.”

She nodded, before looking up at him again for a long moment.

“What?” he asked.

“Nothing,” she grinned as if she had a private joke, “I guess I only just realised how lucky I was to bump into you that day on the bus.”

He nodded in agreement, despite everything, despite all the things that were pressing down on his thoughts, he still would rather be where he was than anywhere else in the world right at that moment in time.

“So you punch as many people as you want,” she told him sitting up slightly and turning to face him, “be bad Harry if you want.”

“Oh, so you like bad Harry then?” he joked, wrapping his arms around her so she had no choice but to sit on his lap.

“He’s definitely surprising,” she said, sitting so her legs were either side of him and leaning forwards until their foreheads were touching.

“Surprising in a good way?” he murmured, finger tracing a circular motion on her lower back.

She gave a shiver of unexpected pleasure at Harry’s uncharacteristic behaviour and leant forward, catching his lips with a long, lingering kiss. She placed her hands on either side of his face softly as they kissed, trying to stop herself laughing out loud at her amazing luck.

Harry was acting the same as he had the night before when she’d argued with him and she realised that he only ever acted like this when he either thought he’d done something to upset her or he had the same sudden realisation, as she sometimes did, about what she really felt for him. She grinned to herself widely when they pulled away for air a few minutes later as she realised that Harry would be in a really good mood today.

“You know, I can’t imagine not doing this everyday,” he told her breathlessly, tucking her braids back slowly.

“What more could you ask for?” she agreed, leaning forwards and giving him another long kiss.

Harry’s hands were wrapped around Kitty’s waist underneath her nightshirt when they heard the key scrape in the door lock. They both

gave an irritated sigh as they broke apart, red cheeked and breathless when Donna walked in.

“And again with the peep show for a living room,” came her sarcastic voice from somewhere behind Harry, who didn’t bother to look around.

“Enjoying yourselves guys?” came a second voice, that of Greg, Donna’s boyfriend.

“We were,” pouted Kitty as Harry took his arm from around her waist.

“I can see that,” said Donna, grinning as she rounded the sofa and surveyed them both as baby Jason sat on her hip.

Harry tried not to let his cheeks flush with embarrassment as Donna watched him with her irritating little secret smile that let Harry know she was thinking or plotting something else. He decided to give her a challenging look, which she caught and gave another small smile at.

“And if it isn’t Muhammad Ali,” said Donna to the room at large as if nothing had just passed between them, “our very own pugilist.”

“Nice one Harry,” said Greg, giving him a big thumbs up and miming punching someone.

Donna merely rolled her eyes and then looked over to her boyfriend, “Better not get too close to Caz else Harry here might be forced to take you down.”

Harry laughed uncomfortably as everyone mocked him for a good few minutes more.

“And you thought I was going to mess up last night,” Kitty said to him finally with a grin.

Donna looked at Harry for a moment, eyebrow arched and a calculating look on her face. Harry found himself almost beginning to hate Donna and her attitude towards him. However, he didn’t have



time to think about this because Kitty gave another laugh, and despite the fact that Donna and Greg were there, leant forwards and kissed him again.

“Fancy getting out of here?” he asked her quietly when they broke apart again and the others were in the kitchen.

“How about the cinema?” she suggested, wicked grin on her face, “Nice and dark? We could carry on this discussion?”

“Perfect,” he told her, already moving to get his wallet. Tonks looked at the address she’d scrawled on a piece of parchment, before studying the street sign. This was definitely the right road she mused, looking around at the cars, and curtained windows, light glowing through them in the darkness. Cathy’s brother lived here somewhere she mused, wondering with a tingle of excitement whether Harry and her would be there now, if she was moments away from finding them, from ending this.

At some deeper level she knew she should probably have told everyone she’d found the address, that she was coming here, but the thought of the look on Remus’ face when she told him she’d found Harry drove all this out of her mind. Her drunken rant at him the previous night had been weighing heavy on her consciousness and the thought of seeing him again while he thought she was angry at him made her feel slightly sick.

She pulled out her wand and cast a useful little charm to show the presence of a magical person in the vicinity. If Harry was here she’d see a red arrow fly off in their direction, as if an invisible archer were there. But this arrow flashed green and sped away towards a nearby flat.

All at once she leapt into action, legs completely bypassing the need for commands from her brain as she ran towards the house, knowing full well what green meant...

Dark magic.

Tonks ran towards the front door, blasting it open and running into the hallway, boots crunching on the broken glass. She surveyed the scene quickly, fire upstairs, movement down the hall, the sound of screaming. No sign of Harry or Cathy yet though.

There was another piercing scream and she set off at once, skidding into the kitchen, eyes falling on a scene she would not like to have erased from her memory forever. There was a dead body lying in the centre of the floor surrounded by blood, over which another man stood, held in some sort of field off the floor.

She looked across to see a Death Eater, hooded and cloaked, eyes trained on the man who began to writhe in pain.

“Drop your wand!” she shouted, her own trained on the man’s heart.

He looked at her and in a millisecond she realised her mistake, they never work alone...

The force of the spell that hit her in the back threw her to the floor and she lost grip of her wand, as it skittered away towards the dead body. She crawled forwards quickly as the two Death Eaters shouted instructions to each other, grabbing her wand and spinning to face them.

“Nymphadora,” came the gleeful voice beneath one of the hoods that sent shivers down her spine, “they send in the ickle girlie to do the grown up jobs now?”

The muggle gave a shriek of pain and Tonks threw a hex towards his torturer which caused him to break the spell and stumble backwards. The second Death Eater gave a yell and threw a curse at her, which blasted her backwards into the dead body, which she hit with a thump, face covered in blood now. She spat it out, and twisted to see a blast of green light flying towards the muggle man who was running towards her. Tonks yelled out but it was too late....the curse hit him and threw him sideways into the cupboards, which he hit with a resounding crack, falling to the floor in an ungainly pile and not moving again.

She scrambled to her feet, wand hand extended, "Put down your wands!"

The woman began to laugh, horrible, high pitched cackling which her partner joined in with. While they were doing this she seized her chance, throwing a curse at the man which threw him to the floor. Another quick curse knocked him out flat.

"Naughty girlie!" cooed Bellatrix, without sorrow for her injured comrade, "you've been practising since I last saw you..."

Quick as a flash she threw a jet of yellow light towards her, which she threw herself away from but which caught her shoulder. There was a blinding pain and she rolled to the floor, gasping with the shock and pain. She looked up to see Bellatrix standing over to her, tugging off her mask and fixing her with a wild eyed look.

"How now fair niece?" she whispered, reaching forward and grasping her injured shoulder and digging her nails into it.

She couldn't help but scream out in pain, to which Bellatrix gave a laugh of pleasure, grinning at her with pure evil in her face. Tonks gritted her teeth against the overwhelming pain and kicked out, boots connecting with Bella's shins and bringing her crashing to the floor. There was a furious scuffle and a confusion of whirling robes and blasts of light until Tonks managed to pin Bella down, hand curled around her throat.

"Go on then, sweet niece," she whispered maliciously, "squeeze a little tighter."

"I'm not going to kill you," Tonks said through gritted teeth, breathing quickly and trying to ignore the blinding pain which was steadily growing in her arm.

"Aw, why not? Can't do it?" mocked the woman, "Not even for revenge?"

“I’ve got a nice cell lined up for your in Azkaban,” hissed Tonks dangerously, “one you might remember, Cell block 13, room 42?”

Bellatrix gave a hiss and struggled against Tonks superior grip.

“You better put ickle Potter next to me then?” she finally said, lip curling with hatred.

“What are you talking about?” demanded Tonks, fingers curling around her neck a little tighter.

“Oh didn’t you know? He’s just as bad as the rest of us...” she whispered deliciously, savouring the confused look in Tonks face, “though his Crucio could be improved.”

“You’re lying,” she said maliciously, slamming the woman into the floor roughly.

“Why would I when the truth is so much more pleasurable?” she asked, suddenly bringing her knees up into Tonks’ stomach.

She rolled onto the floor, hand clasping her stomach as she heaved to get the air back into her winded lungs.

“But I suppose you’ll have to catch ickle Potter first won’t you?” she laughed as she watched Tonks crawling across the ground, “he’s a slippery character isn’t he? Disappearing just like that!”

Bellatrix kicked her in the stomach with a mighty boot and she rolled away, lying still for a moment and trying to fight the black veil that was descending over her eyes.

“Stay awake Nymphadora,” cooed Bellatrix, “I want you to watch this, I wonder if you’ll black out before I pull your arm off...”

She reached down towards her and heaved her to her feet by her collar. She fixed her with an insane grin.

“What’s a matter my little niece?” she asked sweetly as Tonks coughed and spluttered, “hurt again? Poor ickle baby, you’re not very good at this are you?”

“This place...will be surrounded...in moments,” gasped Tonks, unable to drag the air back in as her pain in her shoulder increased again.

It took a moment to realise this was because Bella’s nails were digging back into the open wound again.

“And you get to die here while we’re waiting?” she said, throwing Tonks into the wall, which she hit and fell into a crumpled heap.

“What’s the sacrifice for, my sweet one?” she asked her in an evil whisper, “you won’t make any difference...no one would miss you, no one would be grieved beyond coping.”

Tonks tried to raise herself to her hands and knees and she watched Bella through blood-filled eyes, hardly able to breathe.

“You’re just a silly little girl, aren’t you?” she cooed, “trying to play with the grown ups? Well know this...you’re always going to lose.”

She swept across to the second fallen Death Eater and revived him. He climbed to his feet and they looked down at her, defeated, injured, just clinging on consciousness.

“Bye bye sweet niece,” sang Bellatrix, twisting her wand around and pointing it at her, “first Sirius now you...my, how disappointing our family has become...”

Tonks felt time slowing down as she desperately reached for her wand.

“Avada Kedava!” shrieked Bella, seeing what she was trying to do.

However Tonks was just a little quicker in shouting ‘Accio body!’

The dead body burst into life, flying towards her in some kind of macabre dance, before falling onto her like a puppet whose strings had been cut. The killing curse struck the body and pushed them both across the slippery, blood-soaked floor before they slid to a halt in front against a cupboard.

“Did it work?” asked the man gruffly.

“If not, that shoulder will,” said Bellatrix, walking towards Tonks with wand outstretched, “but just to be sure-”

There was the sound of footsteps approaching the house and Bella looked up, disappearing in an instant. The man also made to apparate, but didn't count on Tonks still being conscious. Heaving the body off her she kicked the man's feet from under him, he fell to the floor and Tonks grabbed his wand. They both scrambled to their feet and after a moment's indecision the man turned and ran and Tonks flew after him.

They burst into the cool night's air and he ran through the garden, which backed onto a small industrial estate. She began to throw curses at him, which he ducked and dodged, managing to scramble into a small dilapidated warehouse through a broken window. She also slid in, adrenaline pumping through her body now, wiping away the fear and the pain as all that mattered now was that she caught him, brought him to justice for the lives he'd just taken.

The warehouse interior was just as dilapidated as the outside, covered in a thick layer of dust and the still air pressing down around her. She licked her lips and tiptoed forwards, raising her wand as she went. With a flick and a whispered charm which echoed around the empty cavernous space, her Auror uniform was replaced with the black robes of the Death Eater. With a moment's concentration her face began to change, taking on the wild eyed, pale faced appearance of Bellatrix. Slowly she raised the mask to cover her face and crept into the building further looking for the man.

She rounded a corner, concentrating intensely on not making a sound or knocking anything over anything when she almost ran into the

other Death Eater, he jumped backwards and faced her, relaxing slightly when he saw the robes. Tonks slowly pulled the mask away from her face, revealing the face of Bellatrix.

She concentrated on the woman expression, the curl of the lip, the slightly mad look in the eyes, and fixed the man with an angered look. Slowly she raised a finger to her lips.

“Sssh!” she whispered slowly and the man nodded.

This works, she thought ecstatically, its working...

“She’s got my wand,” the man mouthed, placing a hand on her shoulder, “I must get it.”

Tonks gave a yelp as his hand closed around her wounded shoulder and dots of white light exploded in front of her eyes. He jumped back regarding her in confusion before the truth began to dawn. Before he could do anything else she whipped her wand to him and stunned him. He dropped to the floor like a dead weight and she fell to her knees beside him, raising a hand to her shoulder as she gritted her teeth with pain.

She blinked the blood out of her eyes, pushing her sweaty hair away from her as she concentrated on her own face again. Slowly and painfully she began to bind the man, first with magical charms, then with rope and finally a charm that was known as the Azkaban Shackle, practically impossible to get out of. When she was done she rested her forehead on the cool ground for a moment, she was finding it hard to think straight now, her mind was a muddled mass of pain and confusion.

Slowly she raised her wrist up to her mouth, whispering something into it before falling forwards onto the floor, landing with a dull thump, lying still as the dust settled about them again.

Various emotions were flicking across Harry’s face as he fitfully slept on the sofa, trying to push the nightmares away desperately.

The flash of red snake eyes.

The curl of the thin lips in a delighted sneer.

We're coming for you...we're getting closer.

"If we put a containment field around here," motioned Remus, drawing the tip of his wand around part of the map, "then layered it over with a second impenetrable field-"

"We've already tried that," said Bill, shaking his head, "Gringotts tried it on their new Super-Vaults, I got through it by simply..."

He continued to list the number of charms and hexes he had used and Remus felt a deep sense of gloom, there was no way they'd come up with a halfway decent field for Azkaban in time for the next outbreak. Silence descended and in the gloom of the kitchen of Grimauld Place Remus and Bill stared at the map, deep in their own thought. Then suddenly they both heard something that made both their ears prick up.

"Remus...Help me..."

The voice died away and they looked at each in horror.

"That was Tonks," said Bill, while Remus was already speaking into his wrist.

"Tonks? Tonks, can you hear me?" he said loudly, eyes fixed on the wall in front of him as he strained to hear any response, "Tonks? Where are you?"

There was no response and the two men jumped into action, Bill ran to the fireplace flooring his head through the network to Tonks' home while Remus employed the emergency Order call signal. Moments later members began to arrive and the call went up to trace Tonks.

One complex spell later and Remus' wand was tuned in to Tonks' presence and Hestia found a rough location for her magical signature. En masse the Order apparated to Greater Eggbuckland. It didn't take them long to find the house that Tonks must have been summoned to



and Remus ran in first, wand out as he followed the trail of destruction down the corridor into the kitchen.

“Merlin’s beard,” whispered Doge, raising a hand to his mouth as they surveyed the scene of carnage.

Kingsley and Emmeline Vance moved over to the bodies, but soon proclaimed them dead as Remus looked around the room trying to get some idea what happened. The iron tang of blood was filling the air, smelling all the more strong to Remus due to his condition and he could almost taste Tonks’ presence.

Doge cast a charm which would show if Tonks had been there and Remus was horrified, yet not surprised to see patching of shining blood, glimmering and glittering showing the path that Tonks had taken throughout the room. He felt physically sick and the complete absence of her made it all the worse – this couldn’t be how it ended.

“Point me,” he commanded his wand, which spun and pointed out the door.

He set off at once at a run stopping every few moments to check the direction, finding himself standing in front of a small warehouse. With a look to each other and a nod, they walked inside, wands out and alert.

“Track,” whispered Remus, pointing his wand at the ground.

Sure enough, a vibrant set of footprints appeared on the floor and it took only the slightest glance to see they wouldn’t be needed, there was a set of bloody footprints there anyway. As one the group moved swiftly into the warehouse, hurrying along Tonks footprints as Remus felt his heart hammering in his throat, every twist they took aware of what he might see.

“There she is!” said Emmeline suddenly, peering into the gloom and seeing two figures on the floor.

“Lumos!” commanded Remus, running over and falling to his knees by her side.

With a shaking hand he grasped her shoulder and turned her over, pulling his hand back in shock.

He looked at it, covered in blood before looking back to her shoulder, pulling aside the torn fabric of her robes to see a raw open wound that was deep and still pumping out blood. In silence he looked into her usually grinning heart shaped face to see a mask of blood and dirt, a long cut down one cheek, her eyes were closed peacefully.

“Is she...?” began Emmeline, before giving a slight sniff, “is she ok?”

Remus looked back down to her shoulder and the blood still pumping out of it, “She’s alive.”

“The Aurors are going to be here in a minute,” said Kingsley, “they can’t find the Order here – our cover will be blown.”

“What do we do?” asked Doge.

“Go back to HQ, I’ll send out the signal to the Aurors, see that she’s looked after and will get in touch with you,” he said firmly and everyone began to move away from Tonks prone body.

Remus wanted to ask if he could stay, he couldn’t face the thought of leaving her lying here like this, so injured. But he couldn’t get the words out and looked up to Kingsley.

“They can’t find you here,” said Kingsley in his deep rumble of a voice.

Remus nodded and with a shared look between them all, began to apparate one by one. With one last look at her prone form, he also dissapparated.

Harry bolted upright from his deep sleep suddenly, gasping as he fought to regain his breath. It was getting more frequent, he realised,

every night now he'd dream, sometimes even twice a night. If it wasn't what Voldemort and his Death Eater were doing, or what he wanted Harry to see, it was dreams of Sirius, of the Veil, of the Department of Mysteries. He couldn't handle it anymore...

He dropped his head onto his knees, wrapping his arms tightly around it, trying to block out the sound of the silence, the cold, the fear...He wanted to be somewhere nice and warm and safe, not here.

Not here.

What was he doing here? What did he think he was doing? How could this possibly work?

But you can't go back, whispered a voice in his head - what will they say? What good will it do? Just because you'll be there won't make the nightmare's stop, won't save anybody, it won't make a difference. He couldn't leave Kitty and he couldn't leave her here.

He drew in a deep breath, exhaling shakily as he tried to straighten his rambling thoughts, stop the shakes that seemed to have overtaken his body, calm down.

There was a noise behind him and he knew instantly who it was, he didn't even need to look up. How did she always seem to know?

She sat down next to him on the sofa, resting a comforting hand on his knee. He unfolded his arms from around his head and looked across to her, she had a deep frown on her face.

"Couldn't sleep?" he asked her, surprised at how weak his own voice sounded.

She merely grimaced at his attempted joke.

"It's too early in the morning for normal Kitty," she told him, "I'm afraid you're stuck with serious me for a while."

"You don't do serious," he said, looking away and staring at the wall.

He could almost still smell the smoke, feel the heat of the flames, see the blood...

"I'm worried Harry," she told him in a small voice, "you're barely eating, you get practically no sleep and even when you do...you just look less rested than before."

Harry was glad it was dark so she didn't have to see the blush creeping up his cheeks.

"What was it about?" she asked him anxiously.

"I don't feel like talking about it," he said stiffly, it was bad enough the first time.

He suddenly realised that he was pressing his fingertips to his throbbing scar again, taken somewhat unawares as he hadn't even noticed the headache he had. Kitty seemed to be watching him however, eyes following the soothing motion he was attempting.

"I think it's time to see a doctor," she told him in a rush.

"What?"

"All these headaches and nightmares, your scar hurting...maybe they're connected?" she suggested quickly, obviously anxious as to his reaction.

If only you knew he laughed to himself.

"It's not," he said firmly.

"How can you say that?" she exclaimed in a low voice, darting a look over to the bedrooms, "You're sitting there with a killer migraine, pressing your scar and shaking so badly I can feel it from here! Harry, there's something wrong!"

"There's always something wrong," he muttered to himself.

He was slightly taken aback, he hadn't realised he'd been shaking but now she'd pointed out he saw that he was trembling all over, a cold sweat making his shirt stick to his back. As much as he hated to say it, she was right, something was wrong.

"Go to the doctors," she told him.

"No."

"I'll come with you," she offered desperately, "please?"

"No."

"Please Harry, I've got to do something!" she told him almost frantically, "I can't sit by and watch you get more and more ill every day!"

"I'm not getting ill," he lied, "it's just...it's too soon since he went. They'll go, I promise."

"You can't promise me that," she said severely, "you have no control over them at all!"

"The doctors can't do anything," he said, equally as forcefully, "leave it be."

"I can't, I've got to do something!"

"Then just stay with me for a bit!" he said loudly, before pausing and saying in a smaller voice, "If you want to..."

She looked at him sadly, before nodding.

"I can do that," she whispered, shuffling closer to him.

They leaned against the back of the sofa and after a while she rested her head on his shoulders, intertwining her fingers with his. He tried

to steady his breathing and forget everything he'd seen but his thoughts seemed to keep returning to it and he worried again about what was happening.

He was in over his head. Way over his head.

He had to go back.

"You're still shaking," she whispered after a while.

"Sorry," he apologised, staring at his hand and hers clasped together, she was right.

Wordlessly she bent down and picked up the blanket he'd been sleeping in, throwing it over both of them and tucking it under. He stared at her for some time as she closed her eyes and leant against him again, worried frown plastering her face.

He couldn't go back he realised all at once - he couldn't leave her.

What was he going to do, his mind screamed at him. He had nobody to talk to, no one could advise him, he couldn't even tell Kitty...All at once the desire to have Sirius back hit Harry once again, if there was anyone he could have spoken to, it was him, he wanted him back so badly...

That gaping hole he felt inside his stomach, that place where the grief and guilt seemed to rest, seemed to eat him up, opened up once more. The pain of losing Sirius hit him as if for the first time, like it did that night in Dumbledore's office, like it did that day in Diagon Alley.

He had to say something, do something, he couldn't hold this all in...

"I got a letter last week," he blurted out.

She twisted around to look at him slightly.

"Oh yeah?" she asked, frowning slightly, "who from?"

“This guy called Antonius Quibell,” he said quickly, “said he had something to tell me about Sirius...what happened to him.”

She straightened up slightly, sensing the seriousness of their conversation and frowned even more.

“Don’t you know?” she asked, carefully choosing her words.

“Yeah, I know,” he said, the image of Sirius falling through the veil slamming through his mind, “only, he said he had more information...about how, and why...”

“It’s a bit weird Harry,” she replied and he felt his chest tighten against her opinion.

It wasn’t weird, it couldn’t be weird...he had to know.

“What is he, a psychic or something?” she asked him.

“Sort of,” he replied hastily, trying to make her understand, “but he asked me to meet him, so he could explain.”

“Now that sounds really weird,” she told him seriously, “what can he tell you that you don’t already know?”

Everything, he thought desperately, what the veil is, where Sirius is, how he could have talked to him if Gringotts knew he was - or thought he was - dead. Kitty was staring at him worriedly.

“This sounds weird to me Harry,” she told him slowly.

“You said that already,” he snapped, before instantly feeling ashamed for it, “sorry. It’s just...”

“You wanted me to tell you that you should go and see him?” she finished, before shaking her head emphatically, “I’m not gonna tell

you what you want to hear when I think it's wrong. It sounds like a set-up to me, by the guy that killed Sirius, maybe he wants you next?"

More than you'll ever know he thought to himself bitterly.

"But, what if..." he trailed off hopelessly.

The only way he was going to get Sirius' death out of his nightmares, the only way to stop him almost constantly thinking about that night at the Ministry was if he understood what had happened - where Sirius was, whether he could get him back.

"I know you want answers Harry," she said to him softly, breaking him from his thoughts, "when you lose someone, you want nothing more than to find out why it happened. How can it be right for someone to just disappear? Where do they go? What happens to them, to you...But this guy isn't going to help."

Harry stared at the blanket for a few seconds, trying to digest her words before looking over to her.

"You're talking about your mum aren't you?" he asked, "about when she died..."

"A bit," she said, eyes clouding slightly, "but more about my friend, Carla. She got killed two years ago and for so long I just couldn't understand, no not even that, couldn't comprehend what had happened...Because she disappeared just like that, for no reason..."

"But if someone gave you the option of finding out what happened to her," he suggested slowly, "wouldn't you want to know?"

"Maybe," she agreed, picking up his hand and lacing her fingers with his, "but honestly Harry? I don't think we're meant to know. Sirius is gone, just like Carla, there's no rhyme or reason to it, I don't know where to, and I know that it hurts...But you can't live your life dwelling on it, because it'll eat you away."



He nodded heavily, her words made sense, it would be what he'd want to be able to tell someone if they'd suffered a loss. But somehow he just couldn't bring himself to believe it, accept it, do what she said. Sirius was just another death, like his parents, that he thought he'd never be able to get over - the guilt of knowing you're responsible for three people's deaths was more than he could carry.

"What if..." he began in a quiet, grief-filled voice, "you can't stop thinking about it..."

"Harry," she tried, shuffling closer to him and laying a soft hand on his face, "I can't tell you that you will ever stop thinking about it...that's what grief is, what love does to you, but you've got to forget your guilt and sorrow, try and remember him how he was, when he was happy..."

"I can't do that," Harry whispered, "all I can see is him dying..."

"Stop thinking it," she cautioned him, looking distressed, "tell me...tell me a happy memory, about him?"

"I can't think of one," he said shaking his head.

"Come on Harry," she pleaded, "think of one, just one..."

Harry tried to dredge up the part of his memory that stored the happier times with Sirius, forgotten and buried beneath what seemed like a mountain of grief and pain.

"Last Christmas," he said finally, "he made us all wear false beards for the day and pranced from room to room, bellowing out carols..."

Kitty smiled sadly before snuggling into his shoulder, "Tell me another one."

Harry thought again for a while, expression creasing with pain every now and again.

“When I found out he was my godfather, that he was best friends with my dad and he offered me a home - away from the Dursley’s...”

Giving gave his hand a squeeze.

“And another one?” she said softly.

“He reminded me of my dad...”

“Harry,” she began, wanting to say something but giving up and changing tack instead, “just keep a hold of them, every time you want to sink into that hole and listen to the pain, just remember the happy times ok?”

“Ok.”

“You can do it,” she told him, before twisting around and staring into his eyes, “how do you feel?”

“Fine,” he said heavily and she gave a smile.

“Sure you are,” she teased gently, “but one day, Harry, soon...all this will be just be a horrible nightmare.”

He gave a slight smile, and tried to hold on to the image of Sirius in the father Christmas outfit. But it flickered and died in front of his eyes as a stab of pain from his scar jolted him and he remembered running down the steps of the chamber, towards the veil...if only he’d ran in and grabbed hold of Sirius, if only Remus hadn’t stopped him, if only Tonks had managed to stop Bellatrix first.

“Try and get some sleep,” she whispered heavily, obviously seeing his thoughts in his expression, “you’ll feel better.”

He bit his lip, gaze darting around before he looked down at the floor.

“I don’t want to,” he admitted quietly.

And she knew exactly why, he was scared of what he'd see if he fell asleep.

She gave him a comforting smile, "Come on, lie down."

He gave a sigh, stretching out on the sofa as she instructed and wordlessly let her put a pillow underneath him and pick the blanket off the floor. But instead of draping it over him, she merely climbed onto the sofa as well, stretching out with him and pulling the blanket over both of them.

"I'm going to make sure you don't have any more nightmares," she whispered, face centimetres away from his.

He stared at her for a moment - she was going to sleep here? With him? He couldn't help but smile slightly, imagining the Twins reaction if they could see him right now, or Hermione's for that matter - Ron's would have been funny...

"That's better," she murmured, smiling with him.

He smiled back at her, still slightly taken aback, but found he soon got over that as he concentrated on matching his breathing with hers, as the shakes slowed and finally stopped and he began to feel warm again for the first time he could remember. It was amazing he realised, he could finally think straight and it became even more blatantly obvious that he couldn't leave Kitty now. She was too important he told himself vaguely as he felt waves of sleep wash over him ever so slowly.

Too important...

After a while he pulled open his eyes groggily to see Kitty wide awake and still watching him but he couldn't seem to lift himself out of the sleep enough to acknowledge this. Eventually the world slipped away from him and he sank into the first peaceful night's sleep he'd had since Sirius had gone.

It was still deep in the night when Kitty noticed Harry stirring from his sleep. She smiled to herself slightly, he hadn't even shown a flicker of a nightmare, the merest hint that his sleep had been anything but peaceful and she felt a strange sense of achievement.

He prised his heavy eyes open slowly and she shuffled closer to him.

"It's still night," she whispered as quietly as possible, "sleep."

She smiled even more when she saw him resolutely forcing his eyes open even more at her words and his green eyes seem to focus in on her after a few moments.

"Sleep well?" she asked in a quiet voice.

He nodded groggily, giving a slight yawn, "You?"

"Yeah," she lied, twisting slightly so she was facing him, "but you're a blanket hogger."

"Sorry," he said blearily, reaching out and pulling it over both of them.

When he made sure it was tucked under her properly he pulled his arm back under, choosing after a moments indecision to wrap it around her waist. A faint smile flickered across her face for a moment, before she shuffled nearer until she was close enough to feel his breath tickling her face.

Tonks became aware of noise, sounds and light shining through her eyelids. She gave a frown, screwing her eyes up even tighter and try to block it all out, becoming aware however of an increasing burning pain in her left arm. She attempted to wiggle her fingers but found a hot pain shot up and down the arm, centred on the shoulder.

Her brain worked in rapid rewind, trying to remember everything that had happened until the moment she'd fell asleep. Then it had come flooding back to her in a moment, the house, the dead bodies, Bellatrix, the warehouse. With a groan through her bruised throat she

prised her eyes open. Blinking rapidly for a while as the world swam back into focus she tried to assess where she was.

She caught site of lime green robes walking past and she tried to clear her throat.

“Wotcher,” came a weak voice which she realise with a shock was her own.

One of the robes bustled over and brandished a wand at her, she flinched and tried to duck out of its way but the owner muttered a few charms and the world swam into focus a little more.

“How are you Miss Tonks?” asked the voice, which moved closer and morphed into a face.

“Where am I?” she croaked, raising her good hand to her throat.

“Yes, you’ll have a little bruising there I’m afraid,” said the kindly woman, whose face reminded Tonks of her mother, “you’re in St. Mungo’s Hospital, you were brought here last night by the Auror division. You were involved in an attack, do you remember anything about it?”

The image of her aunt’s maddened face swam into her memory, lip curling as she dug her finger nails deeper into her shoulder and Tonks gave a flinch at the memory.

“Yes,” she said finally, looking up to the mediwitch, “what’s the damage?”

“Well, we’ve managed to clean up most of your cuts and scrapes,” said the woman briskly realising she was talking to an Auror, “the cut on your face will have to heal naturally I’m afraid. This is due to some type of poison in whatever attacked you which we can’t seem to treat. It’s the same with your shoulder I’m afraid – it’s a very deep wound and it’s been weeping constantly since we stopped the bloodflow.”

Tonks nodded and paused to let herself take in all of this. It sounded suspiciously like Arthur's snake attack last Christmas, a poison that wouldn't heal, but this was no snake.

"Have you tried stitches?" asked Tonks after another moment thought.

"Good gracious no!" said the mediwitch looking scandalised, "we are here to heal Miss Tonks, not butcher!"

"I understand that, but I'm half muggle so stitches don't present that much of a worry to me," she said kindly.

"The poison needs to come out first," said the woman, looking thin-lipped with disapproval, "we've got a specialist supplying the necessary potion ingredients, he should be here this afternoon and we can administer the salve. If all goes well, tomorrow morning we can get it cleaned and closed up."

Tonks gave a frown – tomorrow? That was too long.

"Is it necessary for me to stay here tonight, I feel fine, I can come back tomorrow?" she asked hopefully.

"Miss Tonks-" began the woman with a reproachful shake of the head.

"I'm very busy and have urgent business over last night's attack," said Tonks a little more commandingly.

"If it is that important," said the woman irritably, "you could come back tomorrow morning. But I would expect you to go home and rest, due to the previous injury last month on the same shoulder this will take a long time to heal naturally. I must warn you not to expect the same level of movement in that arm for some time."

"How much time?" asked Tonks, feeling the first prickle of worry.

“It may never fully heal,” she said.

Tonks felt her stomach drop, she was so used to magic being able to treat and injury the thought of an untreatable one was almost foreign to her. She attempted to wiggle her fingers but found the same white hot shooting pain throughout her arm.

“I’ll get you a dressing for that arm,” said the woman bustling off as Tonks fell back into her pillows.

She certainly felt beaten up, not only her shoulder, but her bruised throat, her weary body, she was sure she had bruises everywhere. She thought about the night before, remembering with a disgusted shudder her aunt – how could they be related? How could that monster have grown up with her mother – how can they be so different?

How could she have let her get away? There in her hands she had Sirius’ murderer, like she’d said, a chance for revenge...and now she’d got away...

The woman reappeared with a roll of bandage and fabric, followed in tow by a second figure. Tonks gave him a weak smile, to which he merely nodded curiously.

“This is Severus Snape,” said the mediwitch, “he’s kindly took time out of schedule to brew us a restorative potion for your wounds.”

“Pleasure to meet you Mr Snape,” said Tonks, fighting to keep a straight face through the humour of the situation, “I would shake your hand, but I fear it might drop off...”

Snape merely shook his head at Tonks and the Mediwitch left them. He waited until she was far out of earshot until he turned and spoke to her.

“Can’t we trust you to keep out of hospital for more than a few weeks at a time?” he asked almost despairingly as he placed his bag onto her bed.

“Well, they do have the comfiest beds I’ve ever slept on, and 24-hour service,” she chuckled, her gravelly voice hurting her throat, “it a top quality establishment.”

“Let’s have a look then,” he said, gesturing to her shoulder, obviously not one for small talk.

Tonks pulled down the shoulder of her robes, peeling back the layers of bandage to reveal the wound beneath. Even Tonks, who could feel how painful it was, was taken aback by the view that greeted her. It was a deep cut, which seemed to have been pulled apart and she could see the nail marks of Bellatrix. The immediate skin around it was red raw and the whole shoulder and upper arm was deeply bruised. She was a little worried about the green ooze that seemed to be within the cut, and the smell.

Snape gingerly took her arm, holding it lightly as he examined the wound.

“I didn’t realise you were a qualified mediwizard,” she said conversationally, before he poked part of her shoulder, “ouch!”

“All potion masters are,” he said, in a tone that suggested small talk was not part of this deal.

He continued the examination for another minute, putting a freezing charm on the wound so he could take a closer look at the inside of the wound. Finally he stood back and she fixed him with a grin.

“Was the prognosis doc?” she asked, sniggering at his solemn expression, “will I ever be able to play the violin again?”

“Can you tell me how this happened?” was all he said.

Tonks sighed, no fun.



“I think it was a serration hex, yellow light, hit the shoulder,” she said in a bored voice, “she decided that wasn’t enough I guess – she was digging her nail into it.”

“Bella,” Snape muttered under his breath as if through a sudden revelation.

“Yeah it was,” said Tonks in a loud voice so he knew she’d heard and he looked at her with a carefully blank expression on his face.

“She carries a vial of poison,” he began, motioning to the pocket of his robes, “just here. She dips her fingernails in sometimes, when she really wants to cause some damage. Contains extract of Belladonna, her idea of poetic justice I think.”

“Bitch,” said Tonks simply, “can you fix it?”

“It’ll take a while,” said Snape, pulling out a vial from his bag, “this will numb the arm, take it whenever you feel any pain. I’ve got to get back to Hogwarts to brew something to counter this, a freezing charm over the arm will stop it infecting the rest of you.”

He handed her the potion and she knocked it back with a grimace and a sour look on her face.

“Thanks,” she said appreciatively, “really. Can you just let me know when you’ve got a potion for it? Usual way should work.”

Snape nodded and stepped aside as the mediwitch came over and quizzed them on his treatment. Eventually she redressed the wound and after saying goodbye to Snape, she was allowed to leave herself. The mediwitch wasn’t very happy about this but Tonks left her no choice, placing her arm in a sling, relishing in the lack of pain and walking out of the hospital.

First things first, she needed to get to the Ministry and file her report and then she had to get to HQ and find out what had happened – face the music.

Grimauld Place was unusually busy that afternoon. The news of Tonks' attack the night before had kick-started them all into action and plans and projects were being discussed left right and centre. Within it all Remus was busy sorting through the records Bill had managed to track down on Cathy and he was trying to form a plan in his mind to get to Harry, before someone else did.

The entire Weasley family save for Ron was there, the Twins in their ever increasing outrageous clothes trying to convince Moody on the benefits of some of their products in the war, Charlie was working on the Azkaban problem with Bill. Ginny was sitting with her back against the wall by the fire, under the pretence of reading a book although Remus hadn't seen the pages move in the past ten minutes. Molly was at the stove cooking lunch, Arthur was in deep discussion with Kingsley and Doge and Emmeline were similarly occupied when the latest newcomer arrived.

Snape strode into the kitchen, pausing slightly at the shock of seeing so many gathered there at once. Everyone looked up at him before going back to what they were doing and he crossed the room towards Remus, sitting down at the table next to him and fixing him with what Remus assumed was supposed to be an intimidating look.

"Yes Severus?" he asked politely, laying down the sheaf of paper.

"I've just been visiting your girlfriend," he said, lip curled into a sneer.

"I'm sorry?" asked Remus, frowning at the man in confusion.

"Sorry, did I say that out loud? I meant Tonks," he said with a twisted smile, "I don't know where that came from."

"How is she?" asked Remus, completely ignoring Snape's jibes.

"That's what I wanted to talk to you about Lupin," said the man seriously, "her shoulders pretty mangled. I told her I'll whip something up but I don't think this is going to go away in an instant."

"What happened?" he asked in confusion.

“Bellatrix,” said Snape in a low voice, “poisoned fingernails – she said the woman used a serration hex before digging the nails in...”

Remus leaned back in his chair, trying to take it all in and Snape looked around the room before leaning a bit closer.

“Do you know where she was last night?” he asked in a murmur.

“Not yet,” said Remus cautiously.

“The house of a muggle family,” he said, “the ministry has no record of any disturbance warranting the visit of an Auror last night or any other time.”

Snape let the sentence hang and gave him a significant look

“What are you saying?” asked Remus.

“I’m saying,” said Snape in an even lower voice so that he had to lean forward just to catch what the man was saying, “don’t you think it’s odd how she managed to just guess where the next Death Eater attack was going to be? And it just so happens that her aunt was there? And that she managed to get out alive, in Death Eater robes?”

Remus felt riled by what Snape had to say and stared at the man coldly.

“I don’t suppose you gave her a tip off?” he said nastily.

Snape turned a funny colour and glared at him.

“No I did not,” he hissed, “how do you explain it?”

“Firstly, by not accusing her of being a spy,” said Remus loudly and Snape leant backwards.

The two men stared down at each other for a long moment before Remus became aware they were being watched. He looked slowly to

his right to see Ginny staring at them, book lying forgotten on her knees.

“What are you doing in here Weasley?” spat Snape as Ginny hastily looked away, cheeks flushing, “get out.”

Ginny looked torn between anger and fear and Remus thought for a moment that maybe she was going to say something to them, but instead she collected her things and scurried out of the kitchen.

“There’s no need to speak to her like that,” said Remus finally.

“She has no right to be here,” he countered, before looking back at him, “and you still haven’t answered my question.”

“Refresh my memory Severus,” said Remus simply, leaning back in his chair.

“How do you explain last night Lupin?”

“I don’t know, Severus,” Remus said irritably, “all I know is that she was there and she survived and for that, we are all grateful.”

“I bet you are,” he muttered.

“And what is that supposed to mean?” he demanded, even more riled now.

“You’re supposed to be smart Lupin, you figure it out.”

“Have you got anything of use to say?” he asked, fighting to keep the tremor of anger from his voice, “or is it time to go back and play with your chemistry set?”

“Oh, the werewolf’s got a bite in him,” said Snape silkily, rising to his feet, “I notice it only ever comes out when those he loves is threatened.”

Snape stood up and made towards the door of the kitchen, robes billowing behind him in an impressive manner that made Remus even angrier. After a split second he slammed his fist on the table and ignoring everyone's looks towards him, set his jaw and followed after the man. He reached the hallway to see Snape opening to front door, and after plunging his fist into his robes, pulled out his wand.

With a flick the door was pulled out of his hands and slammed in his face.

Snape turned around, a furious look on his face as he looked at Remus' open hostility.

"What have you got against her?" asked Remus, walking towards the man,

"Nothing I'm sure you wouldn't want to have against her," he replied, sadistic glee in his eyes.

"Excuse me?" Remus demanded furiously.

"You heard me, Lupin," he said, walking a little closer so that his cold back eyes bore into Remus', "we've all seen the way you look at her, the way you hang on her every word, how you just can't wait to be paired up on another little assignment together?"

Remus stared at him, face giving nothing away.

"Well, I'm sure it's only a matter of time before you've got her against the wall," he said simply as Remus' face visibly darkened with anger, "and I'm sure she wouldn't exactly beat you away."

Remus knew that if he didn't turn and leave right at that moment, he would do something he would quite probably one day regret, but it would be a long time in the future. Turning on his heel he began to stride away, before the sound of Snape laughing at him caused him to slow down.

“But I suppose another disappointment in her family wouldn’t be unexpected,” he heard him say, “except this time instead of blood traitors it’d be halfbreeds, strange that-”

“Shut up Snape,” hissed Remus, spinning around, unable to let it go, “if you got something against me, then just say it. But leave Tonks out of your twisted little delusions!”

“Delusions now are they?” he asked, eyes alight with the excitement of knowing he’d found a way to get to Remus, “you don’t think her family would mind if a litter of little werewolves were suddenly under our feet?”

“I’m warning you Snape,” Remus said in a dangerously low voice.

“You’ll what? Get your best friends to beat me up?” he said in a mock-worried voice, “oops, I forgot, you can’t because they’re all dead.”

“Did we hurt you that much Snape,” said Remus in a steady voice that belied his fury, “that even memories and shadows scare you?”

“What are you talking about?” he snapped back.

“Well, James, Lily, Sirius – they’re all dead now, maybe even Peter. So what are you scared of? Are you scared of me? I’m all alone now, I can’t even touch you, yet you seem sure that one day I’m going to get you....You’re even scared of Tonks, just because she was related to him...”

“We can’t help who we’re related to,” said Snape coldly, face suddenly pale, “and I’m not scared of anyone, not you, not her, not shadows.”

“Then what is this all about?” asked Remus slowly and purposefully, “I know you Severus, and you never do anything without reason – even if it is self-cantered.”

“How dare you,” he hissed back, face darkening with anger.

“What? Not afraid of the truth now as well Snape?” he asked, “I’ve always wondered why you gave up teaching Harry Occlumency, whether it really was self righteous pride at something that happened over 20 years ago or something more.”

“And what do you mean by that?” he hissed.

“Awfully lucky for Voldemort that Harry couldn’t do Occlumency,” he said pointedly, “wasn’t it?”

“Why you filthy little-” he spluttered, incandescent with rage, “that brat was not going to learn anything off me – he couldn’t even get up off his worthless behind to even try practising-”

“Don’t you dare insult Harry!” Remus practically shouted.

“Why do you care so much!” he shouted right back at him, “in case you didn’t notice – your boy wonder has run away. He dropped you, us and this world without a second thought – Our hero? Our saviour? A sixteen year old boy who knew he’d end up the same way as his dear old daddy and mudblood mother-”

Remus didn’t even have to think about it, his fist seemed to obey direct orders from his heart without troubling the brain, swinging and connecting with the man jaw with a resounding crack. Snape stumbled backwards a look of surprise on his face for a moment as he crashed into the troll’s foot umbrella stand, which smashed to the floor with him.

Remus strode forwards, grabbing a fistful of the man’s robes and pulling him to his feet, slamming him into the wall.

“If you ever say anything about James or Lily again,” he began, voice dangerously low as he breathed deeply, regarding the man with utmost loathing, “I won’t be able to hold myself responsible for what I’d do.”

“So honourable,” said Snape silkily, cold black eyes boring into Remus’, “so quick to defend the one’s we love...tell me, does Potter even know about you and her?”

“Snape,” he growled, fists tightening as he clenched the robes, “I’m warning you-”

“What do you think he’d do?” he continued, a kind of sadistic glee in his voice as he watched Remus trying to control himself, “if he found out...any one of us could just slip up, without even meaning to.”

“I don’t know what he’d do,” whispered Remus evilly, “but I know what I’d do to the one who slipped up.”

“And what would that be?” he said, smiling in the knowledge that there was nothing the man in front of him could do to him.

“I might just slip up myself and give you a little bite, without even meaning to...”

Snape’s face drained of all colour and for a moment there was real terror in his eyes before it quickly morphed into anger. Bringing his knee up suddenly he winded Remus, who fell to the floor on his hands and knees trying to draw in breath, before Snape fist came out of nowhere and knocked him to the ground. Remus scrambled up quickly, not even aware of what he was doing through the anger that was clouding his mind and launched himself at the man, cursing and punching at one another, wands forgotten.

He lost track of time it could have been only a few seconds or a few minutes since he’d left the kitchen, but suddenly he felt a strong pair of arms gripping him and pulling him away. There were raised voices of several people and Remus was pushed backwards against a wall, firm grip holding him there. He looked up to see the face of Fred Weasley, staring at him grimly.

“Let me go!” raged Snape over by the door and Remus glared at him, “he needs to-”



“Shut your face Snape,” came Moody’s voice over the hubbub, “this is not the time or the place – both of you.”

The silence was palpable, with only the heavy breathing of the two men and Snape’s struggles against his captor breaking the tense atmosphere.

“We are supposed to be a team!” Moody growled, surveying them both with his quivering magical eye, “united we stand, divided we fall, remember?”

“As long as we’re sure which side we’re all on!” Remus spat and Snape made another lurch for him.

Remus also tried the same but the fiercely strong grip of Fred had him firmly pinned to the wall, and likewise George was making easy work of Snape.

“Gentlemen!” cried Molly angrily, “please!”

“You best get out of here sonny,” said Moody, looking at Snape with a slight grimace of distaste.

“Gladly,” Snape hissed, pushing George’s arm away and striding to the door with as much dignity as he could muster with a bruised and battered face.

Without a further word and with a resounding slam of the front door which made the doorframe rattle, he was gone. All eyes turned to Remus, who despite his fury could feel the beginning of shame at having lashed out so badly in front of everyone. Fred’s vice-like grip weakened and he stepped backwards warily as Remus straightened up.

“What was all that about?” demanded Molly, arms crossed.

“A lot of things,” he muttered, turning and heading towards the stairs.

It seemed no one quite knew what to do or say next because he was allowed to ascend the stairs without any further questions. As if in a dream, he walked to his room without any recollection of the journey, sitting down on his bed with a dull thud. He stared at the wall in front of him with unseeing eyes, thinking about the painful thoughts and memories that Snape had conjured, before placing his face in his hands.

Harry scanned the shops on either side of Catrall Street, trying to find Kitty's new workplace, 'Dino's'. She'd only given him rough directions, obviously not expecting him to visit (or not wanting him to visit, he thought anxiously). The street looked rundown, most of the shops along it were either boarded up or looked on the verge of closing down. Harry wondered whether he'd got the right place.

However, finally he found it, nestled between a tiny bookshop and a clothes shop, walking in to find the coffee shop-come-bar deceptively busy. He chose a booth near the counter and slid in, propping his bag between him and the wall and throwing the newspaper down. Kitty was nowhere to be seen and he craned his neck, searching out her distinctive hair in the mass of loitering customers and staff.

He began to wonder whether she really was working here when he caught sight of a tray bobbing through a crowd, closely followed by a frazzled looking Kitty who hadn't seemed to have noticed him yet.

She exchanged a hurried conversation with another girl in a similar uniform before darting away and Harry felt a pang of sympathy for her, closely followed by guilt as he remembered she was doing this to pay rent to Donna for both of them. He studied her working for a while, braids piled on top of her hair in a crazy bun with a short skirt and Dino's tee-shirt, smiling to himself happily. Finally she wandered over to his table.

"Sorry about the wait, what can I get you?" she asked, not even looking at him as she rummaged in the pocket of her apron for a pen.

He grinned widely - she hadn't even realised it was him.

"How about a coke?" he asked in a fake-Midlands accent.

“Sure thing,” she said disinterestedly, scribbling away, “anything else?”

“Whaddaya recommend?” he asked, finding it hard not to laugh.

“Our cheesy chips are particularly good,” she said instantly, obviously well trained, “nachos and dip too, whatever you want.”

“Well, seeing as you’re so nice and so pretty, I’d like your phone number and a little kiss?”

“Excuse me?” she demanded, looking at him for the first time.

He gave her a sweet smile as she stared at him blankly in shock for a millisecond.

“Harry!” she exclaimed, smacking him around the head with her notepad, “Je-sus Christ, you freak!”

Harry laughed delightedly at the look on her face as she glowered at him.

“What the hell you doing here being all creepy?” she demanded, hands on hips.

“Practising my creepiness,” he laughed, before smirking slightly, “nice uniform.”

“Eugh, they make me wear it,” she said, rolling her eyes as she plucked her logo’d shirt, “seriously, what are you doing here?”

“Just bored, fancied some of your renowned nachos and dip?”

“Don’t bother, they’re overpriced and have about as much taste as my notepad does,” she told him, brushing her fallen braids back into her bun.

“You just recommended them to me!” he pointed out.

“Yeah well, false advertisement, so sue me,” she shrugged, “how about the chips, those are good?”

“Ok,” he said, leaning back in his booth, “when you on lunch break?”

“Twenty minutes?” she said, already walking away, “I’ll be over then.”

Harry waved her goodbye, watched her working for a few minutes before turned to his paper with disinterest. He hated muggle papers, they were so boring to him talking about celebrities he didn’t know, TV shows he’d never watched or politicians that all looked the same to him. The big story today seemed to be a double murder in Manchester and he skipped the reports, not really up to reading about more death, he’d had enough of that last night. He amused himself reading the horoscopes for a few minutes, wondering what Professor Trelawney had to say about them.

“Is this seat taken?”

Harry looked up to see a girl about his age slide into the seat across from him, big smile on her face.

“Erm no, feel free,” he said, quite aware she was already sat down and looking comfortable in her new space.

She giggled slightly behind her hand and flicked a wave of blonde hair over her shoulder and Harry almost immediately thought of the words ‘Lavender Brown’. She was wearing trendy muggle clothing and carrying a large bag, he could see the Dino’s logo’d shirt stashed away in it.

“Thought you looked lonely,” she said, flashing a row of pearly white teeth, “I’m Lavender.”

“Lavender?” Harry asked blankly, staring at her in shock.

“Yeah,” she grinned, flicking her hair again, “Didn’t catch your name?”

“Harry,” he said stupidly while thinking, what are the chances?

“I used to go to school with a Harry,” she informed him and he couldn’t help but laughing out loud.

“You don’t say,” he said, recovering from his shock and taking a sip of his coke.

“Oh, is that today’s horoscope?” she cooed suddenly, leaning over the table towards him, “read me mine, I’m Pisces!”

Definitely a Lavender he thought with a small grin, humouring the girl by reading out her fortune, which consisted of a lot of useless mumbo jumbo that he wished he could remember for future homework assignments. Unsure of what the girl was doing there with him, he wandered along the conversation with her, more out of boredom than anything else.

“Isn’t that like, so bizarre, only yesterday I saw a tall, dark stranger!” she said, batting her eyelashes at him, “I love horoscopes, don’t you? They’re like, totally bizarre.”

“Totally,” he agreed, trying to keep a straight face, “you read them a lot?”

“Every day!” she admitted, before giggling again, “Wouldn’t start my day without them! What starsign are you?”

Harry told her, finding himself immensely enjoying speaking to this Lavender-clone. It was as if her brain was only something put there to be used on rare occasions and her style of air-headed banter kept him out of boredom. He felt a bit mean suddenly, judging her like that and was just turning the conversation away from the zodiac when a shadow was cast across the table.

A bowl of chips was dropped unceremoniously in front of him.

“You’re in my seat,” came a clipped voice.

Harry and the girl looked up to see Kitty standing there, arms crossed over her chest as she glared at the girl. Lavender looked slightly put out, frowning at Harry as Kitty pointedly told her with just a look she had to leave.

“I was just-” she began, with a worried look for assistance to Harry.

“Now,” snapped Kitty and the girl jumped, scurrying out of the booth quickly without another word.

Kitty dropped into the seat opposite in silence, choosing to lean back and pull her feet up instead of talking to him. It didn’t take a rocket scientist to figure out she was angry at him and he knew it was because he was talking to the girl but he couldn’t help but feel irritated back to her. He was only talking to her and it was plainly obvious that he had no interest in her whatsoever - Kitty was just being jealous.

“I asked to work the evening shift tonight so I won’t be back till late,” she said finally.

“ Oh, right,” he said, feeling slightly put-out, “what about the cinema?”

“Well I’m obviously not going am I?” she pointed out sarcastically, “you can go if you want to.”

“Right,” he replied, popping a chip into his mouth.

Silence rained down on them and Harry was too irritated to notice Kitty’s sigh, wiping the sweat off her forehead wearily.

“Did you decide that before or after you saw me speaking to that girl?” he asked, a little more bravely than he felt.

She shot him a Look.

“After I saw you talking to Princess Barbie,” she told him, unable to keep the accusation out of her voice.

Harry didn't say anything, fighting the urge to roll his eyes. Kitty fumed away in silence, he knew that she couldn't stand it when he didn't argue back and would eventually be unable to resist the opportunity to bait him once more.

Five...four...(he counted in his head)...three...two...

“She works here you know, got as much sense as a chocolate teapot,” she pointed out to him, “thick as two short planks.”

He almost smiled at himself - she was so predictable. And her mood was so ridiculous.

“I could figure that out for myself you know,” he told her, grinning now, “you can't seriously be jealous of her chatting to me about horoscopes for a few minutes can you?”

“I'm not jealous,” she said, doing a good impression of being affronted, “I'm just tired - jumping to conclusions or what Harry?”

“My mistake,” he laughed as Kitty struggled to pretend to act natural, “mind you, she was quite pretty with all that blonde hair and blue eyes...”

Kitty's eyes snapped up towards him furiously, mouth already open in some angry retort when she noticed that he was grinning widely, eyes alight with humour.

“Very funny,” she said sarcastically, making to get up, “I can see when I'm not wanted.”

“Kitty! Come on, I'm just winding you up!” he told her, laughing now, “Come on, sit back down.”

She gave a frown, hating to be made fun of more than anything else and slumped back into her seat.

“Here, have some chips, you look knackered.”

She took one, munching on it slowly.

“So, who’s the girl?” he asked her curiously.

“Work slut,” she scoffed, “sleep with any guy that stands still for more than five seconds.”

“Right,” he said, casting a look over the Lavender, who was talking to some other guy now, “you obviously don’t like her.”

“Spare me,” she scoffed, before putting on a high-pitched girly voice, “What star sign are you? That’s, like, totally bizarre! Look at my beautiful teeth and blonde hair, hehehe.”

Harry began to laugh, Kitty was completely worked up now and he tried to get her to see the funny side of it all.

“Blonde hair’s overrated,” he told her, plucking a strand of his own bleached hair, “I should know.”

“It looks ok,” she said in a far away voice.

“Kitty, come on, lighten up,” he told her, “what’s up?”

“Nothing,” she said, picking up the menu and studying intently.

He watched her for a second, glancing at Lavender and then back at her with a frown. Maybe that wasn’t it after all... maybe something more was up.

“Kitty?” he asked, leaning across the table slightly.



“It’s nothing really,” she began, before giving a sigh, “I just...had a dream last night, well nightmare really. Can’t stop thinking about it.”

“What about?” he asked worriedly, thinking of his own scrambled dreams last night and the prickling scar when he woke up.

“I’m not really sure,” she said, obviously lying but he let it pass by as she looked so odd, “I’ve just got this really weird feeling, like something’s happened.”

She paused and turned a twisted grin towards him.

“Man I sound crazy,” she laughed, facing him now and helping herself to another chip, “forget it.”

“Oh no, you don’t,” he said hastily, and when she didn’t reply he leant forward urgently, “come on Kitty, you’re talking to the king of nightmares.”

“Yeah I know,” she said heavily, “I just don’t want to think about it anymore...”

“What was it about?” he pressed.

She ate another chip and he noticed she did look strangely unnerved, sitting on the edge of her seat now as she avoided his eyes.

Finally she looked up, fear very real in her eyes.

“It was about-”

“Cathy!” yelled a voice and they both jumped.

A large, rotund man was making his way over and Kitty was already scrambling to her feet.

“You’re not here to socialise,” he said, glaring daggers at her then Harry.

“Sorry Boss,” she conceded quickly, picking up her notepad, “I was on break.”

“Look around, you see how busy it is in here, does it look like you have time for a break?”

Harry frowned at the man, but Kitty merely nodded and hurried back to the kitchens. The man gave Harry a lingering look before storming back off, leaving Harry alone with his chips.

Twenty minutes Kitty was carrying a large tray of drinks past his booth and managed to throw a piece of paper down onto his table. He gave a laugh at her spy-like tendencies and opened it up.

I’m not really working tonight, meet you at the cinema at 7?

Harry smiled happily, caught her eye and gave her a wave goodbye, before wandering out of the café, newspaper left on the table, forgotten. Tonks crept up to the door, listening out to see if she could hear any sign of movement in his room. All seemed quiet, but, she reasoned, with Remus you never did know...She knocked on the door politely.

There wasn’t any answer, but, neither was there last time, so she knocked again. This time she heard a sigh from inside and a voice.

“Yes, come in,” it said wearily.

She pushed open the door and stepped in, well aware she’d never been in Remus’ room and was unable to find her way in the gloom. She could see one candle floating over by the window and she tried to get her eyes used to the dark, noticing a black bulk sitting in one corner.

“Remus?” she asked suspiciously, feeling the Auror in her reaching for her wand.

“Tonks?” came the surprised reply, before a sudden illumination of light blinded her.

She shaded her eyes and finally looked over to see Remus sitting on his bed, clutching a fist of blue flames and staring at her.

“Wotcher,” she said a little weakly, “what are you doing sitting in the dark?”

“What are you doing back?” he asked her suddenly, completely ignoring her question, “I thought you were in St. Mungo’s?”

“I broke out,” she said with a laugh, “should know a little hex isn’t enough to keep me down.”

“Are you ok?” he asked anxiously, “what happened?”

“Well, that’s what I need to talk to you about actually,” she said urgently, closing the door and trying to make her way forwards in the gloom, guided by the blue fire.

She tripped on something on the floor and went stumbling forwards, cursing herself for loosing her cool and giving a slight hiss of pain – the freezing charm on her arm must have been wearing off.

“Do you mind?” she asked him, holding out her own ball of orange fire which she used to direct herself over to the chair that was sitting in front of his desk.

She sat down and placed the fire on the table, giving her shoulder a tentative prod, “I wish they’d hurry up and get a...”

She trailed off after catching sight of his face, illuminated eerily by the dancing blue and orange flames.

“What the hell happened to you!” she exclaimed loudly, jumping out of her seat and walking over to him.

“Nothing-” he tried as she bent down in front of him.

With her good hand she delicately took hold of his chin, tilting his face into the light so she could see it properly. And what she could see, she didn't like. There were two deep purple bruises ringing his eyes now and the bridge of his nose had been split, likewise a small trickle of blood had dried down the side of his face.

"It's not full moon for a week is it..." she asked almost to herself, turning to look out the window.

She was greeted by the sight of a waxing moon, and looked back to him with a frown.

"What happened?"

"I got into a fight," he said, before giving a disbelieving laugh, "I got into a fight."

Tonks gave a small grin before trying to become more demure, just in case he wasn't joking.

"Who with?" she asked, still tilting his face this way and that.

"Snape," he said, avoiding her eyes and she frowned at him.

"Why are you ashamed of that? He's a right git most of the time," she shrugged, "he probably deserved it."

Remus gave a sigh and pulled himself out of her hold, shaking his head.

"What did he do?" she asked him cautiously, sensing this wasn't the sort of fight she was used to Sirius and Snape having, indeed, Remus looked pretty beaten up, in more ways than one.

"It doesn't matter," he said, getting up and leaving her sitting where she was, "drink?"

She twisted around to see him holding a bottle of Firewhiskey.

Her heart plummeted.

“Sure,” she said glumly, turning back in her seat, annoyed at both the fact that Remus wouldn’t confide in her and that he was drinking again.

She listened to the sounds of glass clunking and liquid being poured and stared blankly at the wall in front of her. For some reason she was feeling down now, a sort of hope draining away from her, a feeling not helped by the increasingly frequent twinges of her shoulder.

“Here you go,” came Remus’ voice as a glass of amber liquid was placed in her line of vision.

“Tar,” she said, taking it without a smile or grin.

Remus sat down back in front of her, looking at her depressed face for a moment, before raising his glass.

“To...?” he prompted.

“To alcohol,” she said without much feeling, clinking his glass, “the cause and solution to all of life’s problems.”

He gave her a small smile which she couldn’t return, and she knocked back the drink, relishing the burning sensation as it slid down her throat and warmed her belly. She looked into the glass when she’d finished, deep in thought.

“So, what happened last night?” he asked her.

She gave it only minimal attention, still thinking. She reached for the bottle and poured herself a second glass, looking at it for a while.

“She was right there Remus...” she mused, before taking a swig of the drink, “right there and I let her get away...”

“Bellatrix?” he said slowly, and she nodded heavily.

“I wanted to get her right at that moment, make her pay for what she’s done, what she’s taken away from us,” she paused again here, and both their thoughts turned to Sirius, “but, maybe it wasn’t to be.”

She finished her drink, and concentrated on the glass again, trying to sit in a position that wouldn’t cause her arm to burn with ever increasing pain.

“Why not?” was all he said.

What was that? The tone had something hidden in it that caused her to pause for a moment, it sounded almost accusatory. She felt a prickle of anger, why did he think she couldn’t capture her?

“Because,” she said pointedly, wanting to shout out that she was being beaten up, that she couldn’t breathe, that she was fighting two Death Eaters alone, “because...I was incapacitated.”

He raised an eyebrow at her and she decided she didn’t need to speak to a drunk Remus when she was feeling so bad and he was feeling so sorry for himself, she had more important work to be doing.

“What?” she practically snarled.

He gave her a surprised look, looking wrong-footed by her sudden change of mood.

“I’m sorry,” he said, looking flustered, “I just wanted to know what really happened.”

“What really happened?” she asked in a hard voice, “do you want me to tell you what really happened, Remus? Where do you want to begin? With dead bodies and torture? With rivers of blood and poisoned fingernails? With getting your shoulder ripped out? Why the hell do you think I couldn’t capture her?”

“I don’t,” he tried, looking upset at her outburst, “I just – I’m sorry, I just wondered...”

“Just wondered what?” she asked incredulously, catching his drift perfectly clear and not being able to believe what she was hearing, “How I got away? What, you think I asked my old Auntie for a favour, or that I was helping her?”

“No, of course not...” he said weakly.

But she could see it in his eyes, he doubted her...

“I can’t believe I’m hearing this,” she said finally, fury lacing every word, “would you have been much happier if I’d died then? At least that would have meant I was straight huh? Well I’m sorry, I’m not ready to become another sacrifice just so you can sleep safely knowing another spy’s been eliminated!”

“Tonks” pleaded Remus, sounding stricken, “I’m sorry, I didn’t think...”

“Yeah, well you’d find it easier if you didn’t drink so much,” she said scathingly, rising to her feet and slamming her own glass on the table.

“Tonks!” he said anxiously as she strode towards the door.

“Don’t!” she practically yelled without turning around.

She slammed the door shut with a resounding bang, and leant against it, breathing deeply. Frowning as another shot of red hot pain travelled up and down her arm she trudged towards the stairs, angered, if possible, even more by the fact he didn’t even try to follow her.

Why the hell did she love him anyway?

She strode towards the stairs, furiously kicking one of the banisters, which cracked under the force of her hobnail boots and she practically ran down the stairs, not. Her mind was full of enraged voices, whispering to her in a voice that sounded suspiciously like

Bellatrix about Remus and his doubts about her, that he would think her capable of even associating herself with the Death Eaters...

You're just a silly little girl, aren't you, trying to play with the grown ups? Well know this...you're always going to lose.

She couldn't help the tears springing to her eyes, unable to stop to them falling if she used every ounce of willpower at her disposal. Right at that moment, everything felt black. However, through the tears and rage, she hadn't been watching where she was storming and suddenly she felt an unexpected loss of balance. She came crashing down on a wooden floor, falling on her wounded shoulder with a crack that caused her to cry out in pain.

She lay on her back, chest heaving as she tried to grit her teeth through the waves of pain crashing down about her, continually telling herself not to black out, to keep focussed, to work through it. Eventually they subsided to a level where she could think straight and with a choked sob she pushed herself upright. Looking around herself she found she was in the drawing room, the furniture of which was now covered in white dustsheets, tins of paint and brushes dotted about. She crawled across to one corner of the room, lying her back against the wall and closing her eyes as she waited for the pain to subside again.

Staring into the distance she replayed the conversation in her head, thought about Bella's taunts, thought about Azkaban, her inability to track down Harry, her lack of money, home, everything...It all paled in comparison to thought that Remus didn't trust her, that he didn't love her, didn't even like her...That she loved him so much it hurt and that none of it mattered.

She screwed her face up, raising a shaking hand to her face as the bitter tears fell.

"What's the sacrifice for...you won't make any difference...no one would miss you, no one would be grieved beyond coping..."



AN/ Thanks for all the reviews - i love to think of people reading and actually liking my story!

This is an uber long chapter as i have important univerity work to do this week and won't have time to update else!

## Chapter Twelve

No one knows what it's like,  
To feel these feelings,  
Like I do,  
And I blame you.

Harry groggily padded into the silent kitchen, blearily checking the house for Kitty or Donna, but all was empty. He found a note pinned to the fridge from Kitty explaining she was 'out' (again, he thought), and set about moping around until she got back. She said she finished work at 7, and his afternoon sleep had sorted him until five so he decided to use the time constructively and pulled out the only magical textbook he'd brought with him, Defence, and spent a fitful hour reading in which he reread sentences over, skipped whole pages without realising and learned absolutely nothing.

He wasn't even sure why he continued to study, was it just for self-defence? In case his worst nightmare came true and Voldemort caught up with him and no one would ever know...That Kitty would get hurt...Or maybe it was merely a link to the magical world, a way for him to remind himself it wasn't a dream, that magic did exist.

Because he missed it.

The only place he'd ever felt like he belonged and he'd given it all up - for what? His ideas had seemed so clear in his head before but now...safety wasn't it? Voldemort...Sirius...why had he left? To see Quibell? He'd been gone almost a week and as of yet he hadn't even planned or thought seriously about actually going, only imagined in his head, or dreamed about it at night.

Harry jumped as he heard the front door slam shut, quickly followed by baby Jason's crying. He stared at the door intently, praying Donna wasn't in a chatting mood, he didn't think he could handle listening to her slate Kitty and drop her mystic hints. However, she didn't even attempt to find out if anyone was home and Harry looked down at the book in his hands, almost having forgotten it was there. There was no point in even trying to study he realised, it just created more questions, more doubts in his mind that he could cope with. He

stowed the book away deep in his bag and bending down to shove it under the bed. However, just as he slid it back he saw something beneath a pile of Kitty's clothes that made him hesitate.

He reached in under the bed and pulled it out, recognising instantly the plastic covered book he'd seen Kitty with on several occasions, the one she always refused to show him. If he ever caught her with it she'd instantly get up and leave the room, or hide it away, he'd always wondered what it was for...

Harry sat with it in front of him, knelt on the floor for a long time as he studied the cover intently. What could it be he mused, ears suddenly tuned into every minute sound in the flat, too curious now to push it away. There must be a reason why she didn't want him to see it, he thought to himself.

Finally, and after making one last check over his shoulders, he reached down and flipped open the cover. Her untidy scrawl covered the first page, in the centre of which was a big block of graffiti style writing.

You shouldn't be reading this.

He gave a gasp and slammed it shut - how did she know? Before he realised that obviously it wasn't meant specifically for him and he gently eased it open once more.

The next page was filled with a shopping list, the next a list of figures, clumsy maths sums with the figure 572 ringed in red at the bottom. He felt a little let down, the book wasn't anything mysterious, no secrets or codes, it was just a jotter she must keep around. He skimmed a few pages, seeing only addresses, telephone numbers, even a recipe for chocolate brownies and with a sigh flicked through the pages superfast, as if a flickbook.

Suddenly he noticed something and stopped, letting the pages fall back to where they'd been to reveal a crazy mass of lines, drawn in blue biro. He leant over it, realising in astonishment that it was an incredibly detailed picture and not only that, but Kitty had obviously drawn it. Mouth hanging slightly open he studied the lines and curves

which obviously made up the face of a clown, half its mouth down turned in sadness, the other side grinning like a Cheshire cat.

It was amazing, he thought to himself in surprise, there was not a single straight line in the picture, all curves and waves, meeting and mingling so that at first glance you saw only mess, but the closer you look, the more you could see. In the background now there was other figure, people, obviously it was a carnival of some sort. He had no idea Kitty could draw, she'd never said anything about having any sort of skill at all.

Even more curious now he flicked through the book, stopping every few pages to find more incredibly detailed, beautiful pictures, some in pencil, others in biro or felt tip, but all in the characteristic swirling lines. Most of them seem to depict single people, faces even, usually odd looking faces like the clown, and he was flicking through towards the back when another one caught his eye.

The page fell open at a picture of a face, mouth in a wide 'O' of pain, as if screaming. The vicious slashes of the black pen made Harry shudder and he felt a horrible sense of unease as he stared at the picture which seemed to contain nothing but pure despair and grief. It was as if everything you felt under the Crucio curse, with Dementors, with Sirius' death was transformed into something you could see, touch, study...

He slammed the book shut, breathing hard as he sat back on his heels and looked around the room, unable to get the screaming face out of his head. How could Kitty draw something like that? What had made her be able to see...feel...whatever it was that made Harry feel like he did in the seconds, days and weeks since Sirius died?

Slowly, as if drawn towards a macabre scene he opened the book again to look at the picture, finding himself almost physically unable to keep his eyes on it for more than one second. And slowly the realisation grew within him that somebody else could feel the way he did, that it wasn't just him going insane.

What had happened to Kitty?

He let go of the page and slowly the book fell open into a natural break in the pages as he pondered this with the air of one gently prodding a toothache, as if testing a horrible theory to see when the pain came. It took him a few minutes to see the new picture in front of him, which finally registered in his troubled thoughts as something so completely different to the first that he couldn't understand how they could share the same book.

A happy picture, the first he'd seen, but not only that - it was a picture of him.

Tonks gave a hiss of pain, jerking her shoulder from Snape's hands and giving him a deadly look.

"You're hurting me," she said through gritted teeth.

"Well perhaps if you stopped moving so much," said Snape just as irritably.

She sighed and tried to sit still, but found that Snape was doing far too much prodding and pushing for her liking and she continued to snipe at him throughout the operation, as did he. She wasn't in a very good mood today, not only was she still caught up in the previous evenings row with Remus, she'd had a letter through from Gringotts assuring her that this months wages had been withdrawn to cover her debts. Which meant another month where she had no money, another month where she'd have to borrow money to cover this and another months worth of debts to repay. It was a vicious circle.

"When will this kick in?" she asked Snape, trying to read the report on her lap as he patted her shoulder back together.

"The poison will be withdrawn over the next few days," he said, before adding nastily, "if it works."

"And why shouldn't it?" she asked in a cool voice.

"Because, I don't know what poison is in here, and I can't find out what poison is in here unless I've got a vial of the stuff in my hand,"

he said in a silky voice that belied his gratification at her injury, “so I’m working blind.”

She gave an irritated sigh, seeing a vision of a Gringotts goblin rise in front of her eyes, oh how she’d like to use a nice poison on one of those...

“It may not work at all,” he said airily and she glared up at him.

“No need to sound so bloody chuffed about it,” she muttered.

He fixed her with a look before pulling out a roll of bandage and began to wrap her shoulder in silence. As much as she was supposed to trust and respect her old potions teacher, Tonks could find nothing of worth in his personality to endear him to people and as such, never really spoke to him more than a few sentences at a time. Now she knew why.

Even so, he seemed to be more sore than usual and wondered if it had anything to do with the fight.

Suddenly there was a knock at the door and Tonks looked up to see someone she dearly didn’t want to see poke their head around the frame. And it seemed like she wasn’t the only one displeased to see him. Snape stiffened when he saw Remus, straightening up and glaring at the man. He gave a worried look towards the potions master, before looking at Tonks, nerves obvious from his unsure stance.

“Tonks, could I speak to you for a moment?” he asked and sure enough, his voice was laced with anxiety.

“I’m a little busy right now,” she said, motioning to Snape and her bare shoulder, which was only partially bandaged.

“Oh, I see,” he said as she merely stared at him, “maybe after then?”

“I’m busy,” she said and was sure she heard Snape give a satisfied chuckle, “with the meeting?”

He stepped from foot to foot in an unsure manner, obviously wanting to say something yet being held back by the presence of Snape, who seemed quite happy for some reason.

“Merlin’s sake,” she hissed suddenly, as Snape tied the bandage a little too tightly.

In a flash she was standing up, pulling her robe back over her shoulder, “Thank you very much,” she said courteously to Snape, who merely inclined his head towards her, strange smirk playing on his lips.

She slipped her arm back in her sling and gathered her bags, reams of parchment and rolled up maps and headed towards the door. Remus stood aside to let her through and she marched past him. He gave one look into the room at Snape before darting after her.

“Can I carry something for you?” he asked helpfully as she struggled with her load under one arm.

“No.”

“Tonks,” he pleaded, “I understand you’re busy, but please, can I just talk to you for a moment?”

“I haven’t got time,” she said, trying to ignore the feeling that her heart was breaking.

“Just for a few minutes?” he asked hopelessly.

“Remus,” she said suddenly, stopping in her tracks and fixing him with a look, “I haven’t got time to listen to what you’ve got to say. I’ve got to do this meeting, then I’ve got an 8 hour shift in the Ministry before 6 at Azkaban and I have to babysit James tonight – so tell me, when am I going to be able to talk to you?”

He looked at her, obviously lost for words.

“Maybe tomorrow,” she muttered, before hurrying down the corridor towards the kitchen.

“I just wanted to say sorry,” he said to himself, before trailing after her.

He emerged into the kitchen to see the table full with the entire Order, who were now chatting and congratulating Tonks on her successful capture of a Death Eater. He had to do a double take when he saw her again, all smiles and jokes, not a trace of the anger or pain he’d seen her in about ten seconds ago.

“Good work with Grimbit,” said Moody, shaking her good arm that was still clutching the multitude of items, “what’s the prognosis on the arm?”

“Snape reckons 50:50,” she said with a shrug, “if the poison comes out it’ll heal eventually, if not, well, I can rule out a successful career as a guitarist.”

Everyone gave a chuckle, but condoled with her on her injury. There was a general hubbub as everyone continued to talk amongst themselves, slowly settling into their places. Remus fell into a seat near the back of the table, feeling impossibly low, tensing when Snape walked in. The man looked around the kitchen before walking to the table and sitting down next to Remus, nobody but Moody seemed to have realised as he gave Remus a questioning look. He gave a slight shake of the head, trying to assure him that all was ok.

He pulled out a piece of parchment and a quill, placing it in front of him before getting a glass of water from the sink, he still felt hungover. He looked over to Tonks when he sat back down, wondering how he could apologise for his terrible behaviour and whether she’d ever forgive him when he saw Charlie get up and go over to her. He watched them closely, noticing the way Charlie was looking at her and wondering what was going on there.



Those two obviously had history, history which Charlie hadn't seemed to have forgotten yet he noted as he watched him place his hands around her waist as he talked to her in a low voice. He noticed that she wasn't so happy however, moving away from his hand and shooting a look around the room to see who was watching. She caught Remus looking at her and he quickly diverted his eyes to his parchment.

"Jealous?" whispered Snape maliciously, obviously having seen everything.

Remus ignored him.

"How's it feel to be play second best to a Weasley?" he continued, "must grate the soul."

"Shut up Snape," he muttered back.

"That's the second time you've lost out. Another beautiful girl seeing you for what you really are," he said in a silky whisper.

"Well you'd know all about that wouldn't you?" growled Remus back, stupidly taking the bait.

"And what is that supposed to mean?" he asked in a dangerous voice.

Remus leaned forward towards him, looking him dead in the eye.

"It means, at least I managed to date Lily," he said with a grin.

"Why would I want to date a common mudbl-"

"Don't even say it!" Remus said harshly, getting up and angrily marching over to a seat furthest away from Snape.

He looked back across to the man, who was still glaring at him evilly, looking very much like he wanted to launch at him again.

“Ok, let’s get started,” said Moody and the noise level dropped.

Everyone returned to their seats and looked across to Tonks who was stood at the head of the table, good natured smile on her face.

“Ok guys,” she said, “I’ve found out something pretty worrying that we need to talk about.”

Everyone’s faces lost their mildly happy look and rows of sombre faces greeted Tonks, who gave a sigh.

“You-Know-Who knows Harry is missing,” she said.

Exclamations filled the air and Remus closed his eyes wearily. This was bad news...

“I spoke to Bellatrix,” she said, a hard edge to her voice when she said the name of Sirius’s killer, “and that’s what she said. Now we can reasonably assume they’re putting as much effort into tracking him than we are so we really need to knuckle down and find him within the next few days before they do. And there’s something else.”

She paused, pulling a file from her rucksack which she slapped down in the middle of the table. Moody leant forward and picked it up and Remus glanced the stamp of the Ministry of Magic on it, with the words Confidential underneath. He opened it and Tonks looked up to address everyone.

“That’s the report for the raid I filed yesterday,” she said in a heavy voice, “Moody, the name of the persons house?”

“Spencer Banks,” he said, magical eye roving across the page.

“Banks?” Remus couldn’t help but say out loud.

“As in Ian Banks, Cathy’s stepdad,” she nodded to him, no trace of their argument in her public persona.

Everyone began to talk at once, all sensing this news was the worst they could possibly hear.

“He’s Cathy’s half-brother,” she said when the noise died down, throwing another file onto the table, “now I only found out where he was living that night and decided to check it out before my shift, just in case she’d decided to go there...obviously not.”

Remus felt even worse now, so Tonks had been looking for Harry? He placed a hand over his eyes as he cursed himself for his stupidity – he’d all but accused Tonks of being a spy last night for knowing where they were going to strike. He felt another stab of anger at Snape, who’d planted the idea in his mind in the first place. He looked across to the man to see he had a smirk playing on his lips at this news, staring at Remus.

He felt sick – he’d known all along...he’d been planning that all along...

“So You-Know-Who knows Harry is missing,” she continued, “and he knows more about her than we do.”

“How does he know?” was all Remus could think, speaking out loud quite accidentally.

“I can think of only two reasons,” said Tonks, refusing to look him in the eyes, “either we have a spy amongst us, or someone has been following Harry too.”

He felt sick with guilt.

“Harry!” Kitty yelled as soon as she entered the flat, locking the door and stowing the keys in her bag.

“Heya sweetie,” came a voice from the couch and Kitty glanced over the side to see Donna and Jason.

“Hi,” she said vaguely, “is Harry here?”

“He’s in your room I think,” she said, sitting up slightly, “what’s wrong? You look awful!”

“Thanks man,” she said sarcastically, already moving towards her room.

“No offence,” muttered Donna, turning back to Jason as Kitty brushed the sweat off her forehead.

She dumped her bag on the floor, walking into the room without knocking to find Harry sat on the floor looking guilty. She almost brushed this aside, so desperate was she to talk to him before a prickle of suspicion crept over her.

“What are you doing?” she asked slowly, looking around the room.

“I looked in your book,” he confessed instantly, “I’m sorry! I know I shouldn’t have but it was there and I was curious...and...”

He trailed off at the look she gave him.

“You looked in my book?” she asked in a hollow voice, eyes drawn to where she usually hid it.

Sure enough the corner of the book was poking out.

“Sorry,” he apologised quickly, “but you’re pictures are amazing! Honestly! That one-”

“You looked in my book?” she cut in, seemingly unable to grasp the fact.

Harry nodded silently.

“You looked in my book!” she repeated, angrily this time.

“I’m sorry,” he pleaded anxiously.

“For fuck sake Harry!” she yelled, throwing her bag towards him now, livid, “What is wrong with you!”

He ducked, narrowly missing being clipped around the ear in time to see Kitty storming out of the room. Cursing slightly he jumped up to follow her.

“Kitty!” he called, hurrying out of the room, “Wait, let me explain!”

“Shut up Harry!” she yelled back at him, “you had no right to do that!”

“I only looked quickly,” he tried to explain, emerging into the lounge, “and they’re really good! Really good. That one-”

“Do you understand the concept of PRIVATE?” she shouted, stood in the middle of the living room with her hands on her hips.

“Yes - I’m sorry, but-”

“But it doesn’t apply to you right?” she asked disgustedly, and he was taken slightly aback.

She was more angry at him than he thought the situation merited and he stared at her wordlessly for a second as she ran a shaking hand through her braids.

“What’s happened?” he asked finally.

Her gaze snapped back to him in surprise and after a few moments she glanced at the couch. Harry looked across to see Donna sitting there, watching their argument silently and when he turned back Kitty was already marching off back into the bedroom.

“Don’t mind me,” Donna said to Harry, small smile on her face.

Worriedly, he followed Kitty back into the room, finding her standing with her book wrapped tightly in her arms. He made sure the door

was shut before talking to her, knowing Donna was probably listening anyway.

“What’s wrong?” he asked her calmly.

“You should know,” she said and Harry just stared at her blankly.

“I’m sorry about looking at your book,” he stated again.

“Not about the book Harry! Je-sus!” she cried, throwing it onto the bed, “Just tell me if you did it on purpose!”

“What?” he asked, utterly confused now.

“Did you do it to get me back, for not telling you?” she demanded.

“Do what?” he asked incredulously.

“The newspaper you left today at my work,” she spelled out for him, slowly and clearly, “your idea of revenge or something!”

“Kitty, I have absolutely no idea what you’re rambling on about,” he said in exasperation, “what the hell are you talking about?”

She stared at him for a good few moments, as if trying to work out whether he was lying or not. Judging by the look in her eyes, whatever it was she thought he’d done, she still wasn’t sure about.

“Did you know I have three stepbrothers?” she asked him out of the blue.

“No I didn’t,” he lied instantly, “where are-”

“You didn’t know?” she demanded again.

“No!”

“Not even after this morning?”

“No!” he repeated, almost laughing at this bizarre interrogation, “Kitty, what are you talking about?”

She seem to deflate slightly at this, as if the anger that had been buoying her up since she arrived back had fizzled away and left her feeling vulnerable for the first time.

“You didn’t leave the paper there this morning for me to read?” she asked him again, in a smaller voice this time.

“No, I just couldn’t be bothered to bin it,” he explained and she looked even more upset by this.

“Did you even read it?”

“Not really,” he said, a sudden realisation stalling over him, “there wasn’t something in there, was there...?”

“Front page,” she nodded.

Carefully she pulled the paper out from inside her coat and slowly unfolded it until the bold caption of the headline news flashed out at him.

Double Murder in Manchester

“What...”

“He was murdered last night,” she told him.

“Your stepbrother?” he gasped, reaching out for the newspaper, “I’m...I’m so sorry...”

She let him take it and sat on the edge of the bed as he read the article open-mouthed. He had been found at his flat, no sign of a break-in, witnesses saw people in black coats leaving the scene...Harry felt the hair on the back of his neck stand on end as he

remembered in a sudden flash Voldemort's voice from his dream last night.

We're coming for you...we're getting closer.

It was him, the Death Eaters, they'd gone to the house expecting to find him there hiding, Kitty's brother had been murdered because of him.

He dropped the newspaper to the floor and looked over to Kitty, who was staring at the floor.

"I'm so sorry Harry," she said suddenly, "I can't believe I thought you'd do that on purpose..."

That couldn't have been further from his mind at the point and he stared at her unseeingly, he'd killed her brother, murdered, tortured.

"It wasn't your fault," she said heavily, "I was just...shocked."

It was his fault, Voldemort knew he'd run away, he'd found her brother, he'd find them, find Kitty...

"I guess it must have been some guy he had dodgy dealings with," she continued, picking up the paper and glancing at the photo of her brother.

Harry took a step backwards, he had to get away, he had to go now, there was no way he was going to sit here and lead Voldemort to Kitty.

"Harry?" she said quietly, looking up to him, "it was my dream...I dreamt that was going to happen, or was happening or something..."

"What?" he asked breathlessly, kneeling down in front of her.

"I saw it...It was all mixed up but I remembered seeing him being killed, by two...people..."



“At what time?” he asked, feeling all the blood drain out of his face, “When?”

“After I spoke to you...and we slept on the sofa together?” she said haltingly, “I was awake most of the time except for a few minutes...”

“What did you dream?” he asked in strangled, horrified at the thought she was having his nightmares because she was nearby.

“It must have been a coincidence,” she dismissed, looking away from him, “because I dreamt...it was really stupid...he was killed by...”

“By what?” he prompted breathlessly.

She looked up to him, fear in her eyes.

“Magic.”

Harry stared at her, unable to do anything except mouth wordlessly, feeling horrified.

“I know, I know,” she said with a slight laugh, looking down at her hands, “it’s stupid right? But it was just such a weird coincidence, that he died at the same time I was dreaming it?”

“W- That’s, er,” tried Harry, unable to think straight, “weird...really weird...”

Kitty nodded and looked at the paper again a sighed.

“Did...we’re you...close?”

Harry didn’t think he could take the guilt for a second more, he felt like he was suffocating, that he needed to get out of the room, out of the flat...

“Not really,” she said, indifferent now, “I haven’t seen him for a few years, I’ve never really been that close to any of them...”

That didn’t make him feel any better, someone had died because of such a tenuous connection to him?

“He sort of took after my stepdad if you know what I mean,” she said finally, looking up at him, “no great loss.”

“How can you say that?” he asked before he could censor himself, “He’s dead...”

Kitty looked at him, half in surprise.

“He was also a bastard Harry,” she told him shortly, a cold glint in her eye for a moment, “why do you think I didn’t take us to stay with him?”

Harry didn’t say anything and Kitty looked at the photo with a mutinous glare.

“I’m glad he’s dead,” she said suddenly, violently.

“Don’t say that,” Harry told her, flinching at her words.

“Why not? Whoever did it did me a favour.”

Harry tried not to think about Voldemort doing Kitty favours.

“Listen,” said Harry in a rush, kneeling down in front of her, “maybe its time for us to go somewhere else?”

“What?” she asked in surprise, “Why?”

“Well you know, we’ve been here over a week, and Donna’s not going to put up with us forever, right?” he said, almost desperately, “let’s go?”

“Harry, come on,” she laughed, “we’ve landed on our feet here, and Donna’s not gonna get rid of us for another couple of weeks at the least.”

“Kitty, I think we should go,” he told her seriously as she stopped smiling at his odd behaviour.

“Why?” she asked him suspiciously now, “What’s happened?”

“I don’t feel safe here anymore,” he told her, knowing how he sounded but finding himself unable to care, the thought of Voldemort walking into the flat at any moment to find Kitty was terrifying him.

“Harry, you’re acting really weird,” she said slowly, frowning at him now.

“Let’s go,” he pleaded, “come on Kitty, you don’t want to stay here forever do you?”

“We can’t leave right now,” she told him calmly, “I’ve got my job for a start and things to do, we don’t have anywhere else to go!”

“That doesn’t matter right?” he said quickly, “We can find somewhere soon enough - I’ve got enough money for us to get a room somewhere for a while?”

“Harry,” she began, obviously stuck for words, “I don’t understand...what...so you want to leave?”

“Yes,” he said emphatically, “let’s do it!”

She gave him a look that let him know instantly that she obviously knew there was more to his sudden desire to run than he was saying, and she was suspicious.

“Ok...fine,” she said finally.

“Really?” he asked, jumping to his feet instantly and searching about for his bag.

“Wait! We can’t leave just yet! Give me a few days grace?”

“Why?” he asked her quickly, “What’s to wait for?”

“I don’t get paid for a few days yet and if I leave then I won’t get anything,” she explained.

“Come on, that doesn’t matter, I can pay for everything,” Harry pleaded.

“Harry!” she snapped at him, causing him to cease gathering things from around the room and look at her, “I earned that money and I’m getting it ok? Give me a few days, I can sort out somewhere for us to go next-”

“A few days!”

“Why do you want to get out so fast anyway?” she demanded, standing up now and walking over to him.

“I just...” he began, he just what?

Want to stop an immortal wizard from finding you and torturing you to death.

“If you want me to drop everything Harry, you better tell me the reason you’re so desperate to go,” she said, hands on hips, “what aren’t you telling me?”

His desire to keep Kitty safe collided with his desire to keep her magic-free, to protect himself from being rejected because of what he was. If he told her about why her brother was killed, why he was really on the run, would she still be standing in front of him?

Would she still want to be with him?

“A few days is fine,” he said finally, and her eyes clouded over slightly, “of course it’s fine.”

“It’s fine?” she stated flatly, as if she didn’t believe him.

“Yeah,” he nodded heavily, dropping his backpack to his feet.

“Right,” she said swiftly, looking suddenly angry, “in that case I’ve got some people to see.”

She grabbed her backpack and began stuffing her wallet and various assorted items into it. Harry watched her wordlessly, wondering for perhaps the hundredth time whether he should have told Kitty about him right then.

“See you later,” she said, already making her way to the door.

“When will you be back?” he asked, trotting after her.

“When I’m back,” she answered, shutting the door in his face.

Remus was walking down the corridor of Grimauld Place, nose buried deep in a book he’d recently procured from the Ministry Library, hoping to find a new locator spell for Harry and Cathy when he heard voices inside a disused room. Instinctively he stopped and leant closer to the door.

“You’re just a silly little girl, aren’t you?”

He frowned in confusion – where did he know that voice, it sounded so familiar.

“You’re just a silly little girl, aren’t you?”

He leant even closer – what was going on?

“Did that hurt, poor baby...”

It was such a hate-filled, half-crazed voice that all at once he knew where he'd heard it before, the Department of Mysteries...

"Poor ickle girl, did we fall down?" cooed the voice behind the door.

Remus slowly pulled his wand out of his pocket and placed his hand of the door handle.

"That's good," said a voice, Kingsley's, in obvious appreciation.

Remus dropped his hand from the door handle and gave a puzzled look at the doorframe, as he wondered what on earth Kingsley was doing.

"That's better than good," came another gruff voice, "that's bloody fantastic."

And Moody?

He heard a pleased laugh and decided to satisfy his curiosity by knocking at the door. There was the sound of several people trying to hurriedly move about the room.

"Come in," came Kingsley's easy voice.

Remus walked in, fixing a mild smile on his face and greeting Moody and Kingsley who looked serious and grim.

"Afternoon," he said with a smile, "just wondering if you needed any help?"

"Ah Remus," said Moody at once, looking almost happy to see him, "just the man for the job."

He merely raised an eyebrow at Moody who pointed him to a seat. He walked over, feeling this was slightly ominous and indeed, the sight of Moody giving a wide, if lopsided, grin was hard to look at without a certain sense of foreboding.

“Look who I found,” he said with another grin, reaching with a gnarled hand for the curtain that usually hung in front of a painting.

He pulled it aside and standing there was a fully robed Death Eater.

Slowly the masked face turned towards him in a manner that sent chills down his spine. The figure began to glide towards him and he looked across to Moody and Kingsley, who were staring at the Death Eater with grim expression on their faces, hands on their wands. Remus frowned even more and stared at the figure trying to understand whether this was an illusion or what.

A wand was suddenly brandished in front of him and he stared down the length of it into the blank mask.

“Petrificus,” whispered a dangerous voice.

All at once his arm and leg muscles seized up and he looked across to Moody for help. He didn’t look at him and likewise, Kingsley was enthralled by the progress of the Death Eater. He too stared at it, wide-eyed as a hand was raised to the mask, dangerously long, poison-green fingernails catching the light. The mask was pulled away to reveal the half-crazed face of Bellatrix Lestrange.

“Silly ickle wolf,” she whispered maliciously, bending down in front of him and regarding him with maddened eyes, “walked right into that one didn’t you?”

“Moody?” asked Remus uncertainly, “what’s going on?”

“That’s not Moody,” she said, turning to Moody and running a hand across the gruesomely scarred face, before gesturing to his mouth, “would the real Moody be smiling like that?”

Remus felt a growing sensation in his stomach.

“But his eye does come in useful,” she said, darting forward suddenly until her face was only inches from Remus’, “if we want to spot naughty ickle boys creeping down the corridor.”

“That’s not good,” repeated Moody with a smirk, “it’s bloody brilliant!”

She gave a laugh that sounded exactly like the pleased one he’d heard before when Moody had said those words. Bellatrix stepped back suddenly again and moved over to Kingsley, who had stood up now and replaced his robes with Death Eater ones. She wrapped her arms around his neck for a moment and ran a talon down his face.

“Polyjuice,” she whispered evilly, “one of our favourite potions...”

She suddenly pushed the Kingsley clone away and turned to regard him again. He gave a gulp and tried to think on his feet, not really possible when three quarters of his body was paralysed. She stalked towards him slowly, before darting forwards so she was sitting on his lap, wrapping her arm around his neck.

“We have been naughty, haven’t we wolfie?” she whispered in his ear so that he had to flinch away from her, “sneaking about...making plans...turning on you’re friends...and now we’ve caught up on you...”

She moved her head so that her face was only a few centimetres away from his own, so that he could see every bloodshot vein in her eyes.

“And I’ve got some special for you,” she cooed, pulling something out of her robes and waving it in front of his eyes, “the blade’s pure silver.”

She drew backwards and balanced the tip of the knife just above the folds of his cloak. He waited for what was going to happen next, feeling his heart hammering madly. He stared into the eyes of the woman that would claim her second marauder before her face gave a slight tremor. He moved backwards slightly to see her face give an almighty twitch and she threw herself backwards onto the floor.



Suddenly she was screeching, hands pressed firmly to the sides of her head as she writhed on the floor. The two other Death Eaters looked down at her in surprise, moving backwards slightly. It was awful to watch but Remus didn't trust in letting them out of his sight for a moment. Suddenly Bella's shrieks were making sense, there were words garbled in her awful voice.

"Master – No! I'm sorry – please!"

She writhed some more, still burbling and crying before it lessened slightly.

"Kill him – yes," she whipped around on the floor and looked him dead in the eyes, "Right now-"

She pulled out her wand and brandished it towards him, arms shaking terribly as she stared at him, hair and eyes wild. Her face was still covered in tars and flecks of spit as she rose to her knees.

"Die..." she whispered, before a shrieked command threw out a blast of light from her wand.

And out of it came a white dove.

Everyone in the room's eyes followed the dove fly upwards and land on the top of the bookcase. Remus turned to look at Bella who was still kneeling down, staring at the bird, crazed smile forming on her lips. She began to laugh, as did the Kingsley character, Moody's own scarred mouth pulling into a smirk.

Remus stared in shock and confusion at the woman as she dropped her wand to her side and looked across to Moody. She gave a laugh and walked over to the captive, who was staring at them all with a dazed expression on his face and bent down in front of him so she was eye level.

"Wotcher Remus," she said simply.

And then suddenly Tonks' face started emerging from Bella's crazed one, the hair shortening and becoming electric blue, eyes becoming softer and filled with humour, the ravaged and deranged looking face being replaced with a heart-shaped one that was full of youth and good-nature.

"Tonks?" he practically choked out, still feeling his heart hammering madly against his ribs.

With a flick of her wand his limbs were freed up again and she placed a reassuring hand on his shoulder.

"Sorry about that," she said with a smile, although there was something lingering in the eyes, "practise."

She turned around and replaced her clothes with jeans and a tee-shirt, looking across to Moody and Kingsley, who were still chuckling.

"So, what do you think?" she asked them excitedly.

"Amazing," said Moody shaking his head, high praise indeed from the ex-Auror, "absolutely amazing...you sound just like her!"

"I've been practising," she said proudly and Remus slowly got to his feet.

"Where did you learn to act like that?" agreed Kingsley, "it was phenomenal."

"Ah-ha," she said happily, wagging a finger at them, "we professionals never reveal our secrets."

"What do you think Remus?" asked Kingsley, and they all turned to him expectantly, "convincing?"

"You had me fooled," he said weakly, massaging his heart slightly, "a little too convincing actually. What's all this for?"

“Oh nothing,” she said airily, not looking at him, “just messing about – you never know when it could come in handy.”

“Listen, I’m off, meeting with Dumbledore,” said Moody suddenly, checking his pocket watch, “I’ll speak to you tomorrow.”

“I better get going too,” said Kingsley, “I don’t want to be late for dinner.”

Remus and Tonks waved them goodbye and after the door shut there was an uneasy silence. Tonks moved about the room picking up her bits and pieces she’d scattered about and Remus wondered what he could possibly say after he’d very nearly just been murdered.

“Where did you learn to act like that?” Remus said, remembering the way she had been shrieking and writhing on the floor.

“I don’t know,” she said finally, looking across to him without her usual smiles and grins, “real life mainly.”

She showed him a small wooden box and flicked the lid open. Bellatrix’s voice filtered out;

“Nymphadora, they send in the ickle girlie to do the grown up jobs now?”

She snapped the lid shut and turned around and packed something’s into her bag.

“Nymphadora,” said Tonks suddenly, in the voice of Bellatrix, “they send in the ickle girlie to do the grown up jobs now?”

Remus gave a gulp, feeling strangely sorry for Tonks, with her job, her colleagues and her personality it made it very hard for people to take her seriously and Remus had noted that she was treated differently to the older members. But Remus knew she deserved to be where she was, three years of Auror training was supposed to be one of the toughest things a wizard or witch could ever do and Tonks

could hold her own when she felt like it. She must have noticed his silence because she straightened up and turned to face him.

“I’m sorry about the other night,” he blurted out suddenly and she gave a sigh.

“What do you want me to say?” she asked him simply, “‘that’s ok Remus, it’s a mistake I often make’ or ‘don’t worry, I thought you were a spy too’, what?”

“I don’t know,” he said, “I didn’t mean to accuse you of anything...I was in a bit of a mess that night.”

“Whatever,” she shrugged.

“Listen Tonks-” he tried before she cut him off.

“No, you ought to listen to this,” she said, avoiding his statement and motioning for him to sit down on the sofa again, “she said something I’ve been worrying about.”

He sat down on the sofa and she sat opposite him with the small voice box. A quick secrecy charm was cast around them and a soundproof charm on the room.

“Now don’t interrupt ok?” she said and Remus frowned at her and then at the box.

She flipped the lid open and placed the box on the table.

“Nymphadora, they send in the ickle girlie to do the grown up jobs now?”

There was sudden shriek of pain from the box that took Remus a few seconds to realise it was Tonks’ voice and the sound of curses being thrown quickly followed. He frowned at it deeply, trying to follow what was happening, hearing something heavy hit the floor. Somebody was spitting something out, there was another blast before something

crashed against a heavy sounding object with a resounding crack. He could hear Tonks scrambling to her feet.

“Put down your wands!”

Bella began to cackle, a sound Remus recognised from his earlier encounter with Tonks and the silver knife, more curses, more sounds of bodies being thrown to the floor.

“Naughty girlie! You’ve been practising since I last saw you...”

There was a whooshing sound and he heard Tonks give a yell of real pain, before all that could be heard was her gasping in shock. Remus looked across to Tonks, horrified, but she was staring at the box, biting her nail of her thumb.

“How now fair niece?”

Blood curdling screaming suddenly issued forth from the box, Tonks’ screaming, it was reverberating around the room and Remus made an impulsive move towards the box. However, Tonks merely held up a hand and made a twirling motion with her wand towards the box. There was a moment of garbled sounds before Bella’s evil laughter filled the air and there was a sudden furious scuffle and a confusion of noise, of people falling over and curses thrown, before;

“Go on then, sweet niece, squeeze a little tighter.”

“I’m not going to kill you,” came the sound of Tonks’ voice, tight with pain.

“Aw, why not? Can’t do it? Not even for revenge?”

“I’ve got a nice cell lined up for you in Azkaban, one you might remember, Cell block 13, room 42?”

Tonks paused it here and looked across to him with a very serious look on her face, “Listen to this...”

Remus gave her a wide-eyed look as she twirled her wand again towards the box.

“You better put ickle Potter next to me then?”

Remus’ head snapped up towards Tonks, who merely nodded and played the voice box again.

“What are you talking about?”

“Oh didn’t you know? He’s just as bad as the rest of us...though his Crucio could be improved.”

“She’s lying,” said Remus at once, and Tonks held her hand up for silence.

“You’re lying,” came the disembodied voice of Tonks.

“Why would I when the truth is so much more pleasurable?”

There was a sudden yelp of pain from Tonks and more confusion of noise that sounded like fighting.

“But I suppose you’ll have to catch ickle Potter first won’t you? He’s a slippery character isn’t he? Disappearing just like that!”

There was sudden sound that made Remus and Tonks both jump, it sounded like something heavy hitting the floor. He could hear Tonks’ heavy breathing, which seemed to rattle with the sound of blood in the throat.

“Stay awake Nymphadora, I want you to watch this, I wonder if you’ll black out before I pull your arm off...”

Remus looked up to Tonks again, feeling very suddenly like he couldn’t breathe, she was staring at the box still, far away look in her eyes. Her hand was rubbing her shoulder slightly, as if the memory had induced the pain again.

“What’s a matter my little niece, hurt again? Poor ickle baby, why did they send you here instead of the grown ups?”

“This place...will be surrounded...in moments,” gasped Tonks’ voice.

“And you get to die here while we’re waiting. What’s the sacrifice for, my sweet one? You won’t make any difference...no one would miss you, no one would be grieved-”

“That’s enough,” said Tonks suddenly, waving her wand so that the box fell silent.

Remus looked over to her, horror etched on every feature of his face at what he’d just heard. She was avoiding his eyes again, pulling her feet up on the couch and wrapping her arms around her knees.

“What do you think?” she asked him anxiously.

“Why didn’t you tell me that happened?” he asked in a quiet voice.

“Not about me,” she said, “about Harry.”

“Why didn’t you call me earlier?” he continued, ignoring her question and fixing her with an intense stare.

He didn’t think he would ever be able to rid himself of the sounds of Tonks being tortured for as long as he would live.

“Because, I didn’t think,” she said finally, “I wanted to get to Cathy’s brother before Bella did. I was too late as it turned out, but I thought...I wanted to get her, for...”

“For Sirius,” realised Remus, nodding heavily.

“We’ll get her eventually,” said Tonks firmly and for a second, Remus really believed her.

He tried to imagine what a fantastic day that would be.

“Now what about what Bella said about Harry?” she prompted anxiously, “I haven’t said anything about it yet, I don’t think I should.”

“She’s lying,” said Remus at once.

“Why would she?” asked Tonks in a small voice, “she doesn’t have to protect our feelings.”

“Because that’s what they do,” said Remus, standing up and pacing slightly, “their war is almost just as much psychological as it is physical – it was last time. They turn people against each other, friends, family they all get dragged in, they exploit people’s weaknesses, they just have to find them. They place doubts in peoples minds...”

“But what if she’s not?” she asked, “what if she was being honest?”

“If she was...” said Remus, sitting on the table in front of her and whispering in a low voice, “I don’t think we should tell anyone...we don’t know the full story, but Harry must have had his reasons, this could ruin him.”

“It’s life in Azkaban if anyone ever finds out,” whispered Tonks back, looking anxious, “and I’m not prepared to guard him.”

Remus nodded in agreement and they both looked to the box. With a flick of her wand, it exploded in a ball of blue smoke and she disappeared the fragments into thin air. She then brandished her wand at him and silently asked for his permission, he nodded.

“Obliviate,” she whispered, before turning her wand on herself and performing the same charm.

A few seconds later they both shook their heads slightly and looked around in some confusion. They could both remember everything the voice box said apart from the two lines about Harry and the short conversation they’d just had.



“Listen, I want to explain about the other night now,” said Remus suddenly, feeling he ought to show her the same respect after she’d let him hear such a personal thing.

Tonks didn’t say anything at first, contented instead to pick at the thread of her purple and orange striped socks, a small hole was developing. Remus watched her cautiously and finally she looked up to him, angry look in her eyes.

“How can you explain it?” she asked simply.

“Well, you see, when Snape came in after seeing you at St. Mungo’s he was full of accusations against you, saying you shouldn’t have been at the place, that nobody had sent you and that Bellatrix was there...” he began and she looked up to him angrily but he leapt in before she could continue, “and I didn’t believe a word of what he was saying and started arguing with him about it...I thought he was being purposefully spiteful against you because you were related to Sirius...and then-”

He trailed off, wondering if she was actually listening to him, her eyes had taken on a new steely look and the silence descended upon them like an oppressive cloud.

“Can’t explain it can you?” she asked him finally, sounding not hurt, not even angry, just saddened almost, “can’t figure out what it is about me that you don’t trust? You don’t understand?”

“It’s not that-” he tried weakly but he could see the determined look in his eyes.

“Well how come you can have the balls to ask me if I was acting as a spy for You-Know-Who based on the provocations of a man you haven’t been able to stand or trust practically your whole life?” she demanded angrily.

“I didn’t mean to,” he protested, “I knew you-”

“Well there’s your first problem,” she cut in, eyes flashing, “you don’t know me, ok? And do you know what? For that I am greatly appreciative, because you’ve turned out to be quite a different man than the one I thought I knew!”

She stood up quickly and grabbed her scattered possessions quickly.

“Tonks, please let me explain!” he said desperately, jumping to his feet after her, “I am the person you knew, know, that night I was just so-”

“Drunk?” she accused, eyes flashing, “Paranoid? Suspicious? Moping around in your room because of a stupid school ground fight, convincing yourself you’re worthless, that you’re not fit to be in the Order, that you’re the reason Harry ran away, that Sirius is dead!”

Tonks broke off, angry splotches of red on cheeks as Remus did nothing but stand in the centre of the room, motionless during her entire tirade, shell-shocked almost.

“Well, wakeup Remus! Wallowing in self-pity and alcohol isn’t going to solve anything, it isn’t going to find Harry, it isn’t going to win you any friends-”

“I know!” he shouted back suddenly, causing her to stop mid-rant abruptly.

“You what?” she demanded.

“I know, ok? I know you’re right!” he said, dropping into the sofa and waiting for Tonks to storm out.

He glared mutinously at the carpet in front of him and heard her moving, thinking bitter thoughts. However, instead of leaving, which he would have almost preferred, she was suddenly standing in his line of sight, arms folded across her stomach.

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“It means your right! I just mess everything up! Sirius, Snape, Harry - even you! It’s pathetic!”

“What do you mean?” she demanded.

“Not only do I mess my whole life up, I do it to everyone else!”

“You don’t,” she heard herself say, slightly taken aback by seeing Remus loose control once again, “what do you mean by that?”

“I’m doing the same thing to you now,” he said, almost ranting to himself, “all that doubt and fear, you never get rid of it and I’ve just done it to someone when I know...I know what it feels like...”

“Remus, what the hell are you talking about?” she practically shouted at him, incensed by his attitude.

“Why do you think I was missing from Harry’s life for twelve years? Because I couldn’t be bothered to pop around the Dursley’s to see him?” he asked loudly.

“I don’t know,” she said, “why?”

“Because! James and Sirius basically told me that I was not considered trustworthy enough to be their secret keeper - because Peter was a better alternative than me to protect him and Lily and Harry - when I loved her! Because nobody could know!”

The furious expression on Tonks’ face slid off almost instantly at hearing this and she dropped her arms to her side.

“You loved her?” she asked in a shocked voice, “Lily Potter?”

Remus didn’t reply, too furious with himself for losing control so spectacularly and thinking things he’d tried to suppress for so long.

“What...” she began, before dropping into the sofa opposite and fixing him with an uncertain look, “Tell me about it...”

"I..." he began, before taking a deep breath and beginning in a flat voice, "we only dated for about three weeks during our fourth year, it was basically a disaster because she hated James and Sirius so much and they were...well you can probably imagine the havoc they caused."

"So..." began Tonks, looking uncomfortable, "did James know that you still had feelings for her...?"

"No!" he said emphatically, "Definitely not, no one did - and she was happy and very much in love with James, so that made me happy in a way."

"Oh Remus...I never even thought..." she said quietly, "but I understand..."

Remus nodded heavily before adding in a slightly bitter tone, "Snape knows. He's a little too good at legillimens for my taste."

"So you're fight with him...it was about that?"

"Among other things, he was trying to convince me you had turned spy, and I just lost it..."

Tonks stared at him for a moment, before shifting forwards on her chair to look at him intently.

"So why did you believe him?" she asked.

"I didn't," he said heavily, "I honestly didn't and I'm so sorry about the way I reacted when you returned. But I'd drunk so much by that point and spent the night sitting in that room thinking that I don't know what I was doing - and I know that's not excuse."

He fixed Tonks with a steady look, thinking about what he'd said to her, how she'd reacted...

“I know how hurtful what I said to you that night was,” he told her fiercely, “because it must have made you feel exactly how I did when I was told I couldn’t be the Secret Keeper. Made you feel like you weren’t trusted, by your closest friends.”

“It did,” she told him finally, “but, I kind of understand your reason for saying it, it was suspicious...and I can see how you feel about it now so...don’t think about it anymore.”

“What?” he asked, looking at her in confusion.

“I forgive you,” she said, giving him a small smile, “but if you do it again, I will be forced to take action.”

He gave a small, humourless smile.

“I don’t really deserve it though,” he said, “once you think someone doubts you...it never lets you go...”

“Is that why you never saw Harry?” she asked quietly.

“One of the reasons. James and Sirius’ decision that I wasn’t trustworthy...then I thought Sirius had killed Lily and James and then Peter...my whole world was torn to shreds, so I left...Then seeing Harry in his third year was so terrible, not because he looks so much like James, because he acts so much like Lily and his eyes...”

Tonks got up from her sofa and came and sat next to him. She placed her arms around his shoulders and gave him a comforting hug.

“I never realised any of this,” she told him quietly.

“Well, I’ve never told anyone,” he said, as they pulled apart, “and I felt so guilty when I saw the way Harry had grown up, because of my weakness...”

“It’s not your fault this happened Remus,” she said forcefully, “Dumbledore trusted the Dursley’s and like you said you’d lost everyone...you were probably in no state to look after a baby.”

“Can’t even look after myself, even now,” he said, giving a slight laugh and plucking at his patched robes, “still thinking about it, still letting Snape get to me...”

“Remus, you’ve just lost your best friend, things aren’t going to be good for a while, we all miss Sirius. But you shouldn’t let ghosts and shadows ruin your life now, or what I said before will happen, you’ll wake up one day and realise you lost everybody.”

“I know,” he whispered, “I’m so sorry.”

“I know you are,” she said in an equally low voice, “at least, now I do.”

AN/ Thank you everybody for your amazing reviews - they really cheer me up when i'm suffering with deadlines and presentations! So here you go, house points to the following!

Terr, SeikoTuNeR, InAshenSilence, realfanficts, Element, paris97, Alphamech, AshleighHarryPotterFan, nitigia, Eden Tsukimiya, harrison potter, Black-Hood, AmBro, Rogue7, john, Underpaid Critic, blade13hjp, and last but not least AzureSky123,

And to answer a few questions posed - The lyrics at the beginning of every chapter are from a song called 'Behind Blue Eyes' by 'The Who' - it's an amazing song, you should really get it!

And to answer another question - my favourite band is The Kinks! As you can see, i'm a big fan of 60/70s Mod Rock!

## Chapter Thirteen

No one bites back as hard,  
On their anger,  
None of my pain and woe,  
Can show through.

Hermione climbed the stairs of Grimauld Place with a determined look on her face, Ron hurrying up behind her hissing insistently.

“You can’t do this!” he was saying, “You’ll get into trouble!”

“Ron!” she snapped back, reaching the landing, “I think I’m quite capable of stealth.”

“Even so,” he told her, “it’s wrong!”

“Technically-”

“What are you two up to?”

Ron and Hermione fell silent, looking around them guiltily until they found Ginny, sitting with her back against the banisters, small wizarding wireless crackling with music at her feet. She was giving them both suspicious looks.

“What are you doing sitting down there?” asked Ron, looking down the corridors in confusion.

“Listening to some music,” she said, rolling her eyes fixing him with another look, “and what are you up to?”

“Nothing,” he said quickly, before glaring at Hermione, “right?”

Hermione gave Ron a fleeting contemptuous look before addressing Ginny.

“We’re trying to figure out what Harry’s up to,” she explained.

All at once Ginny's suspicious expression disappeared and she climbed to her feet. She brushed her palms on her jeans and switched off the wireless.

"How?" she asked simply.

"Ginny!" Ron said angrily, before rounding on Hermione "We're not doing this! I don't care how much you glower at me, Harry's going to be so angry when he-"

"Yeah well, Harry's not here," said Hermione shortly, turning on her heel and walking off down the corridor.

Ginny looked at Ron briefly, before following Hermione, leaving him fuming. After a split second he gave an angry snort and followed them, muttering to himself. They had disappeared into the room that Harry and Ron had shared the previous summer and Christmas and he darted in, shutting the door carefully behind him.

Hermione and Ginny were waiting cross-armed next to Harry's bed.

"We shouldn't be doing this," he repeated at once.

"Do you want to find Harry or not?" asked Hermione.

"This isn't going to help!" he exclaimed as Hermione walked over to the door.

She raised her wand and Ron grabbed her wrist, "No magic remember?"

"Oh come on Ron," she scoffed, "we're in a magical, unplottable household, the Ministry's got no idea who's performing magic here."

She locked the door and cast an imperturbable charm upon it, before spinning around and creating a heavy black curtain out of thin air which she draped across the blank picture frame over the fireplace. Ginny sat on Harry's bed silently and Hermione walked over to the



trunk which had been placed against the wall. Harry's name was quite visibly printed along the front.

"They brought this from the Dursley's," she told Ginny, noticing her puzzled look, "I figured there might be something in there that might tell us where he's gone?"

"Hasn't anyone checked?" she asked as Ron paced uncertainly at the foot of the bed.

"I asked Tonks and she said they hadn't, I don't know why," she said, kneeling down in front of it.

"Probably because he's charmed it!" said Ron angrily.

"We'd know if Harry was using magic in a muggle house Ron," said Hermione despairingly.

"Well he should have charmed it anyway!" he snapped, "stop nosy gits rooting through his stuff!"

"Shut up Ron," Ginny said angrily and he glared at his sister.

"What are you doing here anyway?" he retorted angrily, "Get lost."

"Ron, don't talk to your sister like that," Hermione said and he merely turned his glare towards his friend now.

He walked over to the trunk and sat on top of it just as Hermione was reaching out towards it.

"Ron!" she said furiously, "Don't you want to find him?"

"I'm sure Harry didn't draw a map of where he was going Hermione, come on! This is his stuff, how would you like it if I started rooting around your possessions!"

“Well, if Harry’s got such a problem with it, you can tell him to come and shout at me for it! But oops, I forgot, he’s not here!” she said sarcastically, “And if I just so happen to find even the smallest clue that might help us find him or even just point us in the right direction by snooping then I don’t mind if I have to pick every single part of Harry’s secret life apart to get it, OK?”

She practically yelled the last part of this and stood, breathing heavily as Ron stared at her.

“Fine,” he said finally, getting up off the trunk, “snoop away, I obviously can’t stop you.”

If this was Ron’s last attempt at guilt tripping Hermione out of her plan then it failed spectacularly as she merely nodded and flipped the catches down. Ron gave an angry sigh and folded his arms angrily, watching Hermione as she kneeled down and pulled open the lid. He didn’t know what she expected to find there or what she was thinking as she sat studying the contents for a long minute.

“Get on with it then!” Ron prompted as Hermione’s eyes travelled across the contents, “What are you waiting for?”

Silently, she reached in and began to pull out some clothes - jumpers, a few teeshirts, his Hogwarts robes...She laid everything out neatly behind her before reaching in and pulling out a thick sheaf of parchment.

“At least we know he was getting our letters now,” she said finally as she stared down at her own handwriting.

Ron, despite himself, edged forward to look in the contents of the trunk, and sure enough he noticed a few of his own short letters in the pile. Hermione placed them to one side despondently and began to unpack a large pile of textbooks, before pulling out the shimmering material of the invisibility cloak.

“I wish he’d taken that with him,” said Hermione looking slightly anxious.

“He wouldn’t if he’s in the muggle world would he?” suggested Ginny, also getting up and standing on the other side of Hermione.

“I guess not,” she sighed, “but I had hoped he’d take it anyway, just in case...”

She carried on delving, finding old essays, broken quills, Quidditch gear, potions supplies and various accumulated odd pieces from years of using this trunk to carry his life in.

“There’s nothing in here Hermione,” Ron told her sternly now, “can we just stop now?”

She just ignored him.

“Oh no...” said Hermione softly, drawing out a leather bound book and looking upset.

“What’s that?” asked Ginny quickly.

“His photo album,” Ron said, feeling his own stomach dip slightly too, “Hagrid gave it him in our first year...”

Hermione pulled it open and sure enough various photo’s of Harry’s parents and friends began waving at them. They were all silent for a good minute before Hermione voiced what they were all thinking.

“I was sure he would take this!” she said, sounding upset, “How could he forget it? It’s got pictures of his parents in it! And Sirius! And...”

“And us?” suggested Ron grimly.

“Well...yes...” she said, dropping it the floor unceremoniously.

Ginny stooped down and picked it up, flicking through the pages curiously as Hermione turned to Ron.

“I don’t understand!” she said in a high pitched voice, “if he was so upset about Sirius that he had to run away then surely he’d want his photo’s to remind him!”

“Maybe he couldn’t take it with him, because of the muggle girl...” he suggested half-heartedly, “or maybe we were right and this all has something to do with the Prophecy - maybe he really did hear it?”

“Perhaps,” she said, “but still, his photo’s! Didn’t he even want to remember us at all?”

“Er guys,” said Ginny suddenly, “I think maybe he did...”

They looked across to her and she flipped the book over to show them, sure enough there was a blank space where a photo had been ripped out. Hermione gave a strangled cry and wrenched the book out of her hands, flipping through the pages quickly.

“He’s taken three!” she said excitedly, “Look! One of his parents from the beginning! One that Colin Creevy took, you know the one in the common room of us three? And one here...a newer one...”

“Well the rest around it are from Christmas,” said Ron, seeing one of Tonks, Lupin and Moody all wearing Christmas hats above the blank space, “it must be...”

“Sirius,” whispered Hermione, nodding, “but...what does this mean? He took photos of us with him, then surely...I don’t know...”

“Well, he obviously wanted something to remind him of you guys,” said Ginny, “so you’re not the reason he left, if that’s what you think.”

Ron and Hermione were silent, both secretly feeling very pleased that Ginny had said this as they had been secretly wondering if this was in fact the case, that they hadn’t been understanding enough, hadn’t realised sooner, hadn’t done anything about his unhappiness.

“But, I hate to say this, but I think Ron’s right, there’s nothing in here to help us,” Ginny said, placing the book carefully on the floor.

Hermione's shoulders visibly slumped and she stared morosely around at Harry's meagre possessions.

"I guess you're right," she sighed heavily, beginning to repack Harry's trunk, "I was so sure he'd leave us a clue..."

"Why would he?" asked Ron, sitting down heavily on the bed.

"I don't know," she struggled, "just that, if it wasn't our fault he'd want us to know...that if things got really bad we'd be able to find him..."

"Yeah but remember what I overheard from that Healer?" suggested Ron bleakly, "Harry's gone mental-"

"Ron! Don't say that! He's not mental," Hermione said in a high-pitched voice.

"Not in a stable frame of mind or out of touch with reality then," he said irritably, "whatever that means."

"It means that he might not fully realise what he's doing," Ginny told him.

"Oh come on, do you really buy that?" scoffed Ron, "Harry might be upset by what happened to Sirius, but he's not one to go barmy over it! He'd just had enough of the Dursley's, upset over Sirius, scared stiff by whatever that prophecy said, because I know he's heard it, so he did a runner!"

"Well - how does he think that's going to help?" demanded Hermione.

"Do you reckon Harry's thinking like that right now? About the most sensible course of action? You know what he gets like when he gets angry or depressed right?" Ron told them both, worked up himself now, "Remember when he blew up his Aunt and did a runner then?"

And that was only because she insulted his parents - so I think he's quite capable of disappearing with all this shit that's been going on lately!"

Both Ginny and Hermione stared at him open mouthed for a moment, perhaps a little taken aback at Ron's logical and intuitive argument.

"I forgot about the time he blew up his aunt..." said Hermione finally, "I forgot he'd run away already..."

"Yeah but at least he ran away to the magical world then, we know he only went to Diagon Alley this time to withdraw all that money..."

"And now he's hiding in the muggle world," added Ginny, also sounding despondent now.

"Where he knows we won't find him..." finished Hermione sadly.

They pondered this in silence for a few moments, Ginny dropping onto the bed next to Ron as Hermione stared at Harry's open trunk. It took Ron a while to realise he could see her struggling against the tears and although Ron sympathised with Harry in some way, he cursed him for all the worry and the pain he'd caused them.

He stared at the trunk too, although he'd been dead set against the idea, he had almost hoped they would find something useful. Now he just felt that their invasion of his privacy was all the worse because they hadn't found anything...He picked up the sheaf of letters and began to flick through them unseeingly, there was so many, from him, from Hermione, even a few from Lupin. He came across one from Sirius which he stared at for some time, he still couldn't believe that after everything they'd been through, Sirius was gone.

Just like that...

"Well, at least we know one thing," said Hermione finally as she laid a Gryffindor pennant on top of the newly packed trunk, giving a small sniff, "he's got his wand with him, that's something at least."

“He wouldn’t have left that for all the tea in China,” said Ginny, “even if he was with muggles.”

“At least he can defend himself,” she said, straightening her shoulders and turning to Ron, “give those back Ron, I’ll put them away.”

Ron however, was staring open mouthed at one letter.

“Ron?” Hermione said louder, “Let’s put them back.”

After a few moments she turned to him expectantly, as did Ginny.

“Ron?” his sister queried, “what is it?”

“You were right Hermione,” he said in a quiet voice, “maybe there was something in here after all.”

“What?” she said excitedly, jumping up to look over his shoulder.

“A reason for leaving at least...”

She saw a letter, this time written on a scrap of notebook paper, badly spelt and scrawled in an untidy, cramped hand. She didn’t recognise the handwriting and she immediately settled down on the bed next to Ron and the three of them read it silently.

Dear Harry,

You’d have got this letter in one of two ways I guess, either my well-thought out attempt to get into your house didn’t work and the police was called, in which case this has been posted, or I actually managed to get in and I left this in your room. Either way - you’re obviously reading this so mission accomplished (not spelled right I know).

Anywho, enough of the rambles. This letter was my attempt at being serious if I didn’t manage to be so today (which is probably likely yeah?). I just wanted to tell you that I am not in fact insane, although at times it may seem like that, and I’m sorry if you think I’m being a

weird stalker type coming to your house and all that. I found your address out from some guys we used to go to school with, they knew Dudley. I was going to explain why I came over right about now, but I'm still not really sure - is it enough to say I just felt like it? Feel free to laugh out loud at this point, I did.

I'm really not very good at writing stuff like this, there's a special word for it isn't there, when you can't say the thoughts you have in your head? Anyway, if you didn't think I was mad before, you do now. And while your opinion of me is low, I'm going to get the point. I didn't believe you in the park when you said people could be listening or watching us, I just said you were being paranoid. But I saw that woman come after you as soon as you left, and I watched you arguing with her as she walked you away. I don't pretend to understand what the hell is happening, what you could have possibly done that would mean you should be followed or watched or whatever.

Maybe you're the ones that insane, hey?

But I do know this - everything I said to you in the park was the God honest truth. Harry, I can see your unhappiness, anyone could if they took two seconds to look at you properly. And I know it must be something more than your Aunt and Uncle, why else would you not want to go back to school? I didn't buy any of that crap about not being able to pay fees - like they'd spend any money on you anyway. I also know you've been thinking of getting out long before we met, maybe you're already planning it now and I want you to know that if you do, you come to me ok? I'm going to give you my address so that when you get out you come here straight away right, I can help you, you know I can.

So now my reputation as a madwoman is fully cemented you can make up your own mind. If you decide I'm being way too pushy since we only just met then forget about it, and I wish you all the luck in the world, whatever happens. But if you decide the other way, you know where to come.

Anyway, better go, gotta go see a man about a dog,



K.

Ron dropped the letter to his knees and for a second they just sat in shocked silence. Then finally Ron expressed, in his own unique way, the basic science of the situation.

“Bloody hell.”

Three hundred miles away, in a flat so unlike Grimauld Place that their co-existence seemed almost impossible, Harry Potter was resolutely not thinking about magic. Or his friends. Or Sirius. Or Voldemort and his dreams and any other number of worries that had been pressing down upon him.

Because today was a good day.

Kitty, whose moods swung high and low in a matter of moments, had returned from a morning shift in high spirits and Harry, who’d suffered nothing but his own company for five hours, was more than pleased to see her. She’d even returned bearing an afternoon take-away, spending her hard earned cash on a veritable feast of Chinese which they had eaten in front of the telly, whilst watching some children’s cartoon about a talking dog.

And because Kitty was in a good mood, Harry was in a good mood, which meant they’d so far had the most enjoyable day spent together since they’d left Surrey. Now they were spread out on the sofa, feeling full and contented, ready to enjoy an evening of pure wasted time.

She left to get drinks and took such a long time doing this that Harry had become completely absorbed in the telly, thinking vague, contented thoughts. When she finally returned, she dropped into the sofa suddenly, nearly giving Harry a heart attack at the unexpectedness.

“Don’t scare me like that!”

“Sorry,” she smirked, “how would you like to be scared?”

“Oh ha-ha, my sides are aching,” said Harry in a monotone, bored voice, “you’re such a comedian.”

“I know,” she laughed, pulling something onto her lap, “sometimes I feel my talent is wasted on you though.”

Harry looked down and noticed it was her sketchpad - the one they’d argued about the day she’d found about her brother. He was a little unsure of what this meant, was she going to bring up him snooping through her stuff? He hoped not, today was going so well.

She had a pen in her hand, which she was tapping unconsciously against her wrist, a peculiar habit of hers Harry had recently noticed, as she searched around for a cigarette and a lighter.

“Are you drawing?” he asked, slightly timidly.

She gave a shy smile, settling back into the couch as she breathed out a plume of smoke.

“Yes.”

Harry gave a short laugh, she sounded so defensive...

“What’s the picture?” he asked, reaching for the book.

She slapped his hand away, grinning slightly, “I haven’t drawn it yet...”

“What will the picture be then?”

She snickered to herself, pulling her feet up onto the sofa and sitting cross-legged. She pulled open the book and riffled through until she found an empty page and held the pen up to his face.

“Oh no! Not me!” he exclaimed in horror, putting a cushion in front of his face.

“Oi!” she laughed, pulling the pillow away, “it’s just a little picture! And besides, you owe me one for not going mental at you snooping.”

“You did go mental,” he pointed out.

“That was about something entirely unrelated!” she proclaimed, “Come on Harry! Just a sketch - I’ve never had a willing dummy before!”

“Watch who you’re calling dummy,” he joked.

“Come on!” she cajoled, before muttering under her breath, “Dummy.”

“Fine,” he said, shuffling around so she could see him properly, “but be kind.”

“Depends if you’re a good dummy or not,” she cautioned him, pulling the lid of her pen with a flourish, “if you fidget you’re getting horns and a bandito moustache.”

She fiddled with the pen for a moment, which didn’t want to spill its ink before finally get started.

“Don’t look at me,” she cautioned, “just watch telly or something - I don’t want you grinning like a cheesy photo.”

“Why do you want a picture of me watching telly?” he asked her, slightly mystified as he moved into position as she said.

“Just relax,” she said, ignoring his question, “pretend my wandering gaze is not here at all.”

Harry just laughed and Kitty lapsed into silence, furiously scribbling away out the corner of his eye. At first being a dummy was quite easy, he found his attention wandering as he watched commercials flash past - a soap opera cliff hanger, kitchen cleaner, a new movie, a funky looking car...But then he soon found out that what starts out

like a natural slouch quickly becomes uncomfortable and he was soon marvelling at his own inability to sit still.

“Stop moving,” she cautioned him several times over the next ten minutes.

“I’m getting a numb bum,” he complained as another cartoon came on.

“Just think about how the poor couch feels having you spread all over it,” she said absentmindedly.

He gave a slight laugh, stealing a look over to her when she wasn’t looking. Her braids were starting to tumble out of her ponytail giving her a slightly Hermione-like frazzled look as she industrially shaded in something. She glanced up suddenly and Harry tried to revert back to position.

“Harry!” she said, laughing, “Stop moving! Je-sus! I’ve never known anyone fidget like you!”

“It’s boring!” he whined childishly and she got up, flicking the tv station over.

“There you go! Healthy dose of the sad wastrels of our country - talk show time.”

Harry focussed on the programme, he’d seen a few of these since spending his afternoons mulching in front of the telly and he had indeed been amazed by the pathetic lives of some people. Like ‘My mum thinks she’s 16 - mutton dressed as lamb’ was really a serious troubling worry that you had to tell the entire nation about...

Today’s story was a bit different though, it was on the theme of mothers and a young girl that couldn’t have been any older than him and Kitty was resolutely trying not to cry about something. He frowned at it slightly - they were talking about drugs or something, and then the girls mother was screaming and yelling and there was the mention of ‘alcoholic’, ‘abuse’, ‘druggie’ and various profanities. It

suddenly felt to Harry as if the flat had gone incredibly quiet and that the volume had been cranked right up, there was a weird feeling in the air.

Then just as the girl was screaming 'If wish you were dead!' the telly suddenly died and forgetting he was supposed to be sitting still, Harry turned to look at Kitty. She slammed the remote control back on the coffee table and silently turned back to Harry, making little flicky motions with her pen for him to get back in position.

There was a terrible expression on her face.

He stared at the blank television, suddenly thinking about her mother and what he'd been able to piece together from overheard conversations and he suddenly realised Kitty had never really explained to him what had happened.

"Kitty?" he began, hesitantly.

"No you can't move yet," she said resolutely.

"No, I'm ok actually," he said, before lapsing into silence for a moment.

Out of the corner of her eye he could see her pen movements were suddenly a little more fierce, a few more violent slashes.

"Do you miss your mum Kitty?"

"What?" she asked quickly, her voice had a certain edge to it that almost made him give up there and then.

"Do you ever miss her?" he repeated, staring ahead.

She was silent for such a long time that Harry thought she was ignoring him. He recalled what her father had yelled to her all that time ago, that Kitty was the reason she was dead...

“Sometimes,” she said suddenly, shrugging, “we were never really that close to be honest.”

Harry thought about this for a moment.

“But you still miss her right?” he ploughed on resolutely.

She frowned at him slightly before giving another small shrug, “I guess.”

“When she died...” he began awkwardly, “did it hurt?”

Again her pause before answering was uncomfortably long.

“I didn’t find out for a while,” she told him, leaning back against the sofa now, “and it was a shock, I guess it hurt...but...”

“But what?”

“I really only felt guilty, because it was my fault,” she admitted, picking at a thread on the sofa, “and that’s a really terrible thing isn’t it?”

“Why was it your fault?” he asked almost breathlessly.

She gave a heavy sigh, taking some time to compile her answer.

“She was ill, I wasn’t supposed to leave her alone,” she struggled, “but I went anyway...”

“Why did you leave?”

“Because it was Christmas, and I hate Christmas,” she said with a small humourless laugh, “and I was on my own with mom, and I hated my mom.”

“Why?” he asked.

“How long you got?”

Her poor attempt at a joke died midair and for a few moments there was only the sound of Kitty half-heartedly sketching.

“Why?” he asked again.

“Because she was crap,” she said evenly.

Harry frowned ahead slightly - what kind of answer was that - what did that mean anyway?

“A crap mom doing crap things,” she elaborated, “and she was ill...”

“What was wrong with her?”

“She had more problems than me,” she joked again, “fucked her mind up with drugs, manic-depressive, etcetera etcetera...most of the time she was another planet - completely psycho...usual crap.”

Harry tried to figure out what to say to this.

“Apparently, or according to my studious research into day time talk shows, people who’ve had, you know, abusive relationships and all that are prone to that sort of thing, like to take it out on their nearest and dearest. So that makes me feel better,” she said and Harry was taken aback momentarily by the bitterness in her voice.

Harry remembered the way her stepfather had coolly pushed her through the table, tried to strangle her, her fury when he mentioned it later, the way she’d yelled ‘he’s tried it before!’, things that go bump in the night...

“I can see why you always wanted to run away,” he said finally.

“Yeah, it’s always so much fun,” she said sarcastically, “but I’m such a sucker, always go running back eventually, ‘oh mom, I’m so sorry, I didn’t mean it’, blah blah blah. And it’d just start all over again, same old routine. New shelter, new life for two weeks until she needed

another hit! More money, ring up my stepdad, more fighting! Sometimes I just wished I could just kill them so I wouldn't have to put up with all that crap or me just so I wouldn't have to listen-

She paused suddenly in her rant as if she'd realised how loudly she'd been speaking and Harry forgot all about sitting still for the picture, turning to her quickly. She looked slightly shocked at herself.

"I didn't mean to say that," she said, giving him a flicker of a wary look - apparently scared she'd freaked him out.

"Come here," he merely said, wrapping his arm around her shoulders so she sank into a silent hug.

After a moment she gave a dry, humourless laugh.

"Sometimes I wonder how much I can tell you before you realise what a messed up bitch I am."

"Will you stop talking like that?" he said, almost in exasperation, "Sometimes I wonder how much you can keep secret before you explode."

She gave another slight laugh.

"Most people wouldn't say that if they'd just heard someone admit they'd contemplated murder."

"I've already seen you contemplating murder, remember?" he said, running a thumb across the newly healed cut down the side of her face.

He wondered how his life had ended up like this, why he didn't seem to particularly care about any of Kitty's admissions, how they could be so calm discussing things like this... Sometimes he was amazed at how much they both put up with - Harry with his secrets, Kitty with her past and the way they both tried to deal with it. When they finally pulled apart Harry gave her a long, lingering kiss until she was forced to bat him away with her book.



“Back to the art after that brief psychotic episode,” she commanded, making him sit back into position.

But he was too worked up now, thinking about Kitty’s old life, how she was free of it now, how he didn’t want to stop still now, how he just wanted to kiss her until she realised she had somebody who wasn’t going to mess her up.

And then the terrible thought occurred to him, that maybe he would.

“Why did you ask me all that Harry?” she asked suddenly, breaking him from his terrifying reverie.

“Huh? Oh, erm,” he tried to focus, “I just wanted to know, I was quite surprised you told me to be honest.”

“Me too,” she laughed, “I’ve never told anybody about her before, and him.”

Harry turned to look at her again and she sensed what he was about to say.

“Everyone knew of course,” she dismissed, “but there’s a difference between guessing and knowing...”

“How come you told me?” he asked her curiously, feeling suddenly intensely trusted and important.

She gave a shrug, avoiding his eyes, “Because I wanted too.”

Harry couldn’t help but keep the pleased grin off his face, turning to stare ahead again as he revelled in the fact that she trusted him, that she told him things, that she wanted him to know...

“And besides, sometimes I feel like there’s all this stuff we don’t know about each other, know what I mean?”

She said it almost casually but almost instantly there was the icy grip of fear at his heart. He tried desperately to keep his face carefully blank. Kitty squinted at her pad of paper, eyes flicking from Harry's face to the sheet quickly, trying to commit the likeness. Harry wondered how many secrets Kitty thought he was hiding and once again the desire to tell her became almost unbearable.

"But then again," she said in a light voice, "that's why we work so well right? We don't need to know. Who cares about the past anyway? That's behind us."

Harry stared ahead resolutely.

"Yeah, I guess so."

There goes another perfect opportunity to tell her he thought to himself - why couldn't he do it? He tried to imagine how she'd take it - he was 11 when he found out and he remembered not actually questioning it that much, but 16 was a lot different to 11. Besides, how would he feel if he were in her shoes and she suddenly turned around and told him she was an alien or something?

There was no way she'd believe him, he'd have to prove it somehow and he spent the next few minutes envisioning the moment of truth in his head - perhaps a nice harmless charm, or a patronus which was pretty? Sometimes the Kitty in the movie in his head reacted well and was completely flabbergasted but excited at the news, and other times, the worst case scenarios, showed her screaming and yelling, grabbing her bag and making it her twelfth disappearance. Actually that wasn't the worst case scenario, the worst, worst, worst case scenario was that she would be scared of him, terrified even...

"Ok, so bare in mind it's my first attempt," came a voice from somewhere far away.

"Huh?"

"All finished," she told him proudly, holding the picture against her chest protectively, "but you can't laugh or I'll hit you."

“Oh yeah?” he said, shifting out his long-held pose and turning to face her, “I know I won’t laugh, go on, show it to me.”

“No smirking either,” she said pointedly.

“I don’t smirk,” he retorted with a laugh.

“You’re not going to like it,” she said flatly.

“Stop procrastinating and show me!”

“Ah-ha, procrastinating, I remember that one,” she mused, casting her mind back somewhere, “means wasting time doesn’t it?”

“And you’re world class at it,” he pointed out, “come on!”

Kitty had a very anxious look on her face and for a moment he thought she was just going to dart from the room but with a sudden burst of courage she practically threw the notebook at him. He picked it up in surprise and looked down at the picture that was spread across the page, emerging like a picture from television static as he looked down at himself in a mass of crazy, whirling lines. And sure enough, it was him. Kitty’s drawing style was completely unique, he’d never seen someone fill a whole page with just lines but in a way that some of them just seemed to flow into a face, hair, shirt collar...

“You hate it don’t you?” she said flatly.

“Are you kidding?” he breathed, still trying to take it all in, “It’s amazing!”

“You’re just saying that because I threatened to hit you,” she said and he almost laughed out loud, she sounded so anxious.

“No I’m not! It is! It’s...amazing...”

He couldn't really find words to describe it because he felt like when he was looking at her picture, he was looking at whatever it was she saw when she looked at him, what she really saw. And there was no Boy-Who-Lived, no scar visible, just...him...And he felt the experience was quite scary in a way.

"The eyes aren't right though," she was complaining, "you're expression changed towards the end so you're eyes don't match your face."

Harry's stomach tightened, thinking about his worries about telling Kitty, his fear of her being scared of him, leaving him...She was right, the face looked relaxed, almost bored but she'd put it all in the eyes - how was that even possible?

"It's amazing," he repeated in a far away voice...

"Hmmm," she made a non-committal sound in the back of the throat.

"Come here," he said, grinning as he moved down the sofa and gave her a long kiss.

Whatever worries or critiques Kitty had been thinking, they all seemed to disappear within a moment and she grinned slightly into the kiss, letting the picture fall to the floor. They shuffled into a more comfortable position until Harry was practically pinning Kitty down and they both were quite happy to stay there until Donna arrived home suddenly and unexpectedly.

"Sheesh guys, give it a rest," was all she said as she walked in, "do you ever actually talk or is this what you spend you're day doing?"

Harry pulled away from Kitty quickly, frown on his face. She looked slightly annoyed too.

"Ignore her," she mouthed, leaning up and kissing Harry again.

However, he couldn't concentrate knowing Donna, in all her creepiness, was flitting about and sure enough a second later she spoke again, causing them to jump slightly.

"Hands out from under there Harry," she joked, "there's children present."

Harry pulled away, cheeks flushing slightly. Kitty gave a slight shake of her head and he sat back on the sofa heavily.

"Hello to you too chuck," said Kitty sarcastically, buttoning her shirt back up.

"Hey," she said merrily, as if she hadn't just been so rude, "busy day?"

She gave a smirk.

"Cup of tea guys?" asked Harry wearily, already getting up.

There was a chorus of agreement and he trudged into the kitchen, cursing Donna for always interrupting before he reminded himself it was her house. He flicked the kettle on and took his time fetching cups, milk and sugar, desperate to limit the amount of Donna-Exposure he had to endure. He was just pouring the hot water into the teapot when he tuned into their conversation.

"What's that?" Donna was asking.

"Oh nothing," said Kitty dismissively, "don't-"

There was the sound of a slight scuffle.

"-look," finished Kitty lamely.

Harry guessed Donna had wrestled the sketch pad off her.

"Cool picture," came the impressed voice.

That didn't sound like Donna...

"Eyes are a bit weird though."

Ah there she was, always taking Kitty down a notch.

"Yeah, I said that too," she admitted.

Why did she trust her? Why did she even like her? As far as Harry could tell, apart from letting them stay here, Donna had been a terrible friend to Kitty, always with the snide comments, sarcastic remarks and backhanded ways.

"Harry liked it though," said Kitty hopefully, always with the second chance he thought wearily, shaking his head.

"I bet he did," laughed Donna dirtily, "said thank you pretty well eh?"

Harry glared at the teapot angrily - she was beginning to seriously get on his nerves. Thank God they were leaving soon...

"Jealous?" asked Kitty airily, although he could hear it in her voice, that little edge...

The one that told him Kitty wasn't as oblivious as she made out.

Donna just began to laugh and Harry picked up the mugs, plastered a fake smile on his face and walked back into the lounge.

"Ah, that's magic," said Kitty gratefully, plucking the mug from him.

His stomach gave a slight jolt at her words but he wordlessly handed Donna the second cup.

"I didn't realise you could draw Caz," she was musing and Harry glanced at Kitty, who was looking awkward.

She obviously didn't want people to know.

“Just a hobby,” she shrugged, “only thing I was any good at in school.”

“Oh yeah, how did your GCSE’s go?” Donna asked interestedly.

Kitty gave a short laugh, “I sort of missed the exams, and the coursework deadlines, and the lessons so here I am, unqualified government statistic!”

Donna just laughed, “Yeah, you always were crap at that sort of stuff.”

Kitty’s smile faltered for a moment.

“I don’t reckon you need exams to be a brilliant artist though,” said Harry, giving Donna a pointed look.

“Yeah, I’m a regular Van Gough,” snickered Kitty, flashing him a grateful look.

“Yeah you are,” he countered, “except without the whole ear thing...”

“Suits me better attached to my face right?” she joked, “I’m not in for that whole lopsided look.”

“I dunno, it’d be a talking point,” he shrugged, trying to keep a straight face, “anyway, needn’t be that extreme - you could make your hair the talking point or something.”

“Caz’s hair already is a talking point,” supplied Donna as she lifted baby Jason out of the cot, “do you know what her real hair colour is Harry?”

“You know what, I don’t?” he said, before laughing in amazement and squinting at her roots.

“It’s that mucky blondey-brown that doesn’t have a name,” she frowned, plucking one of the pink strands out and examining it, “where’s the fun in that?”

“Blonde?” Harry snickered, “Really?”

“Not as blonde as you, peroxide boy,” she teased, ruffling her hands through Harry’s dyed hair, “you’re roots are already showing too.”

“Thrilling as this conversation is,” said Donna suddenly, rising to her feet, “me and Jase here have a dinner date with the old folks so we’re off. See you later.”

They waved goodbye and fell silent as she went into her bedroom. Harry turned to Kitty, eyebrows raised. She looked slightly puzzled at her friends behaviour.

“Wha-” he began but Kitty shook her head violently.

Sure enough, Donna walked back through the lounge suddenly, picked up her keys and waved her way out the front door. They waited a moment to make sure she was truly gone.

“What was all that about?” he said to her finally.

“I don’t know,” said Kitty, still looking slightly confused, “guess she must be really stressed about something - did you do the washing up today?”

“Yeah - and that wouldn’t make her be so horrible to you,” he pointed out.

“She wasn’t being horrible to me,” laughed Kitty and Harry couldn’t tell if she believed what she’d just said or not.

“She said you were crap at school!”



“Well, I was,” Kitty shrugged, “never went most of the time and usually got expelled if I did!”

“Yeah, but,” struggled Harry, “she didn’t have to say that. And she was mean about your drawing.”

“She said the eyes were weird Harry,” pointed out Kitty, picking up the book and examining the picture once again, “which they are.”

“No they’re not,” he argued, “that’s what you saw - she always finds a way to put you down!”

“No she doesn’t,” said Kitty, looking slightly shocked at this.

“Fine, don’t believe me, just pay attention to how she acts next time she speaks to you.”

Kitty just shook her head slightly at his words, but he could see she’d taken it on board. Wordlessly Harry drank his tea, watching Kitty touch up the picture here and there, finally scrawling a signature and a date on the bottom. She didn’t look very satisfied with it.

“I don’t understand why you don’t like it?” Harry pointed out, noticing she was still frowning at her book.

“It’s not as good as I want it to be,” she said heavily, “but I’m just not good enough.”

“Listen,” said Harry with a grin, taking the book and pencil off her, “I am going to prove that you are a fantastic artist in the most embarrassing way I can think of. Now pose.”

“What? You’re gonna draw me?” she asked, almost grinning now.

“Of course,” he said, shuffling around and balancing the book on his knees, “and you’ll see, you’ve got nothing to worry about.”

Kitty tried not to laugh, sitting in the same pose of him, Mona Lisa-like secret smile on her face as Harry attempted the impossible.

Art had always been his worst subject at his muggle school and although that was years ago now, he'd seen enough of his doodles from Professor Binns' classes to know he was no Picasso. And although his drawing rapidly began to take a form more generally associated with a turnip, he found the actual process of drawing very calming and the studying of someone's face so intently an odd experience. Although he thought he knew what Kitty looked like, he'd never actually studied her face like this and found that actually, there was a lot of new things to see. Yet actually getting these down on paper was a lot harder than it looked and even he was surprised at just how badly he could draw when he'd looked down at his finished piece.

"Ok, finished."

"Let's see then," said Kitty, looking excited.

"Now, before I show you," he cautioned her sternly, "you must remember that this is proving a point right? That I'm rubbish at art and you are fantastic right?"

"Right?" she laughed.

"And that my picture bears no resemblance to how I see you, or what you look like, right?"

"Affirmative! Although that does kind of defeat the purpose of drawing me," she pointed out.

"Right, now don't laugh or I'll hit you," he mimicked in Kitty's accent.

"Stop procrastinating and show me," she merely said, sweetly.

Harry flipped the page over to show her. He almost lost it there and then - Kitty's face registered shock, then disbelief, then a wild desire to burst out laughing, before looking worriedly at him, apparently

anxious not to offend him. He narrowed his eyes at her, daring her to make comment.

“It’s...well, it’s definitely human, isn’t it?” she conceded in an even tone, “And my braids definitely do kind of look like miniature snakes....”

She gave up, taking one last look at Harry before bursting out into gales of wild laughter and Harry forgot all pretence of being angry or stern and joined in. Finally they were gasping for breath and Kitty held up the picture, grinning madly.

“I love it though! It’s so monumentally crap that it’s good!” she said exuberantly.

“I’ll take that the best way I can,” he snickered.

“No seriously! It’d pass as modern art for sure!” she giggled, “I will treasure it always.”

“Please don’t,” was all he said.

“Sign it,” she commanded it, shoving a pen in his hand, “and if you’re ever famous, one day I’ll sell it and make a fortune!”

Harry laughed, wondering what she’d think if he told her he was already famous as he signed the paper. Kitty took the book off him and spent the next few minutes giggling and pointing out her favourite worst bits of the drawing.

“So, can you admit now that you’re an amazing artist?” he asked her.

“Well, compared to you, yeah,” she laughed, flicking through the rest of her book.

“Compared to most people!” he insisted, “I should take you to one of those art galleries in town and then you’ll see how much better you are than most of that stuff.”

“Oh, taking me to a gallery eh Harry?” she merely said in a fake, posh accent, “how incredibly refined of you.”

“Just trying to give you a bit of culture,” he joked, “I don’t know anything about art!”

All the painting I like move, he thought to himself silently, imagining Kitty’s reaction if she came across Sir Cadogen or the Fat Lady.

“You wouldn’t really take me to an art gallery,” she laughed, as if the idea was completely and utterly bizarre, “can you imagine!”

“Grab you’re coat then,” he merely said, jumping up.

“What?”

“Grab you’re coat - let’s go get some culture,” he prompted, pulling her to her feet.

“What?”

“Come on, let’s go, to the gallery!”

“What, now?” she asked blankly.

“No, next century, of course now!” he told her.

“Harry - don’t be ridiculous!” she laughed.

“Grab. Your. Coat!” he merely said, before picking up his own and his wallet.

“Ok, ok, fine! I’ll admit that you believe I’m a brilliant artist,” she told him, “if you stop being bizarre.”

“Catherine Earl!” he said sternly, “If you don’t grab your coat now I will be forced to throw you over my shoulder and carry you out of this building!”

He started ushering her towards the door and she merely continued to laugh, completely nonplussed as to what Harry was doing.

“Are we seriously going to an art gallery?” she asked him.

“Yes!” he exclaimed in exasperation.

“But why?”

“Because we can!” he replied, handing her a coat, pocketing his wallet and keys and all but pushing her out of the flat.

“So, I could swim the Channel if I wanted but I don’t!” she giggled.

“Don’t be ridiculous, you’d be run over by all the ferries,” Harry replied, locking the door behind him.

“Are we really going to an art gallery?” she asked him again.

“Are you deaf as well as slow today?” he replied, slipping his hand into hers, “Of course we are.”

“But why?” she repeated and Harry rolled his eyes.

“I don’t know, consider it a first date.”

“You’re taking me on a date?” she said, eyebrow raised.

“Yeah.”

She was silent for a moment, as if trying to take all this in, before suddenly giving a laugh.

“About time!”

Whilst Harry and Kitty wandered around Wolverhampton's largest art gallery, laughing together and occasionally pointing out things they liked, attempting to discuss in posh accents the 'superb use of colour', Remus was thinking about Tonks.

Immediately after his long conversation-come-argument with her, he'd had marched up to his room and thrown every single bottle of Firewhiskey or alcohol away, had visited Sirius' room and sat there for some hours, thinking. All the anger he'd carried around since that fateful night when they'd discussed Secret Keepers, all the frustration over Lily and Harry, he realised had to let it go of. Because Tonks was right, it was going to eat him up eventually and he couldn't afford to lose the few friends he had. He couldn't afford to lose Tonks, not after this, he knew that this was her way of saying he had one last chance, that he had to make things better or she'd never speak to him again.

So he decided to make a concerted effort to make up to Tonks for everything he'd put her through in the past few days. It was this sudden decision that found him standing in the foyer of the Ministry of Magic the next evening, entirely unsure now what his sound reasons for visiting at such a late hour had been. However, as he reached the security desk Remus greeted the watchwizard warmly, who merely demanded his wand to be weighed and measured.

He flinched as the printed receipt bore the words Restricted Access across the bottom in red letters and the man gave him a look.

"May I see your species registration card please?"

He could hear the distaste in his voice. He handed over the small card, which the man studied closely and suspiciously. Most of the time he managed to ignore the blatant specism you got from being classed and tagged a werewolf, but sometimes it really angered him – as if he were some semi-human monster that couldn't be touched with a ten foot broomstick.

“You have restricted access to the Ministry,” the man told him importantly and Remus fought the urge to roll his eyes, “where are you heading?”

“Auror department, I’m visiting Nymphadora Tonks,” he said, showing him his visitors badge, “she’s working late.”

The man consulted something on his desk and Remus craned his neck to see, feeling his mouth drop open slightly when he caught sight of a large map spread across the desk, upon which the ground floor plan of the Ministry was mapped out. Across the page several colour coordinated dots were moving about with small name tags floating next to them.

The Marauders Map.

There was no mistake, it was all there, the people, the rooms, passageways all marked on and the guard was turning the page to show the next floor up. There were less people on this floor and he noted with a smug feeling they hadn’t figured out how to create several floors on one page and as such had created a veritable book of maps. They also hadn’t figured out how to zoom into room and wings, so that he had to search a smaller book for the Auror department.

He stared at the maps, memories flooding back at the creation of the original. It had been Sirius’ idea to create a map of the passageways and the idea had mushroomed until before they knew it charm after charm was being layered on it to show people, animals, passageways, you could zoom into whole rooms, pan out across the grounds. He had been working on a small charm that would have displayed the emotions of the little dot-people when it had been confiscated.

“It seems she is still there,” said the man, looking up and giving Remus an annoyed look when he realised he’d been looking.

“Excellent, may I go and see her?” asked Remus, well aware he was within his rights, even as a sub-species to visit the law-and-order departments.

The man’s moustache quivered and he looked as if he would very much like to send him packing, but eventually gave a defeated look, “You’ve got to wear this.”

He produced a red card that hung on red cord with the words, Restricted Access also printed across it. He gave an inward sigh, they might as well have a huge sign following his head saying WEREWOLF HERE!

“If you trespass these zones,” he said, shoving a map of the ministry into his hand, of which three quarters were blanked out, “the sirens will sound and you will be detained.”

“Thank you so much,” he said sincerely, although it contained a tiny amount of sarcasm, “I most certainly won’t.”

He turned away from the man and walked through the hallway towards the lifts. This had been the first time he’d entered the Ministry since the night Sirius had died and he tried to avoid looking at the Fountain of Magical Brethren, which was now repaired and bore no signs of its destruction. He entered the empty lift and pulled the grill shut with a snap, glad for the accusing stares of both the statues and man at the desk to have been blocked.

When he reached the Auror department he stepped into silence, aware that most of the lights were dimmed and only a few booths were occupied. The one closest to the door looked up when they saw him enter, eyes immediately travelling the red card hanging around his neck.

Remus gave him a nod of the head and a smile as if to assure him he wasn’t about to rip him to shreds but the Auror merely regarded him steadily, twirling his wand between his fingers in a manner Remus assumed was supposed to be threatening. He looked across the sea



of booths, unsure of where she was, deciding to just check the ones which had the lights still on within them.

The first one was a small man who was actually asleep on a pile of parchment and he smiled at the thought of anyone catching an Auror unawares – they were notoriously jumpy and dedicated to the job. He guessed you had to be with the training programme they were put through. He'd always wondered how Tonks fitted into this stereotype, she certainly never presented herself as the Moody-type.

He caught sight of a head a blue hair towards the back of the office and made his way across. He finally reached her booth, which was smaller than the others and whose walls were absolutely covered in pictures, photos, articles and small scraps and items, the desk space was piled high with more parchments than Remus thought he'd ever seen in one place, some placed on the floor of the booth and towering nearly over her seated form. The whole area gave the look of a recent explosion, but underneath it all he could see a kind of order that was hard to put into words, much like Tonks herself, her personal space was a conflict of terms that was strangely endearing.

Tonks herself was sat on a wooden chair on casters, her legs propped up on the desk to reveal heavy-duty purple and blue boots beneath the dark blue Auror robes. She seemed completely oblivious to the world, reading something that was balanced on her knee, arm still in a sling as she twirled a lock of hair around her wand. He watched her for a few moments longer than was necessary, thinking that he hadn't often seen then serious side of her.

So much for constant vigilance he thought with a smile, creeping stealthily towards her. He knew for a fact he could be quite silent at times like this, a skill honed over years of sneaking out of dorms after hours with the Marauders.

He pictured the look on her face when he would surprise her before a sudden flurry of movement caught him unawares. She had twisted around in her seat quicker than he could follow and had somehow kicked his feet from under him. He fell to the floor with a heavy thump and looked up to see one large boot on his chest and a wand pressed against his heart.

She stared at him for a moment.

“Wotcher Remus,” she said, giving him a twisted smirk as she took her boot off his chest.

“Hello Tonks,” he said in a pained voice.

She bent over him and gave him a curious look that lasted a few seconds longer than comfortable, before flicking the red card that hung around his neck with her wand.

“What’s all this then?” she asked him, taking a look at it, “Restricted Access, possibly dangerous?”

For some reason for a moment he felt intimidated, aware for the first time that Tonks was quite capable of being threatening if she wanted to.

“I best be careful then.”

She stepped back and offered a hand to him. He took it and she pulled him to his feet and he gave a wince, feeling like his whole back was now on fire.

“Was that really necessary?” he asked, attempting to put some humour in his voice.

It sounded flat and unwelcome.

“You caught me unawares,” she said, flopping back down into her seat and summoning one from the next booth over, “Sorry.”

It rolled on casters and drew to a standstill just behind his legs and he felt himself sit down on it almost against his will, feeling strangely lost around this new Tonks. She was obviously still angry at him, or unsure of how to act after their messy argument.

“No need to look so scared Remus,” she said with a soft laugh, propping her feet back up on her desk.

“I’m not,” he said quickly, before giving a shaky breath, “you just surprised me that’s all.”

“Sorry,” she said again with another grin, sounding anything but, “anyway, what are you still doing up?”

“Could ask you the same thing, strange time to still be working?” he said, looking around her booth.

“Got some stuff to catch up on,” she said simply.

She motioned to the piles of parchments around her with a rueful look and he gave a knowing nod, feeling like she was settling back into the Tonks he knew.

“Want some coffee?” she asked, “I was just going to take a break anyway.”

“That’d be nice,” he said and she gave a pleased nod.

After a few moments rooting around her table she located two mugs and gave a look into them. With a crinkled nose of distaste, she showed him the insides, green with mould.

“I was planning on seeing how far I could cultivate these,” she said, shaking her head sadly at them, “but alas, it is not to be. I best go and wash them eh?”

Remus gave a chuckle and watched her stand up, still staring at the mould in fascination.

“Do you think it’s possible to create an entirely new species?” she mused thoughtfully in what he generally acknowledged to be her joking voice.

“Not unless you’ve got a serious amount of magic brewing in those cups as well as coffee,” he replied easily.

“Well...” she began seriously, before cracking up, “coffee-based life forms eh? That’d give Picard and Spock a run for their money.”

“What?” he asked politely puzzled.

“Nothing,” she snickered to herself, absentmindedly walking away with the cups, “be back in a mo.”

She tripped over a wastepaper basket, giving it a surprised look before disappearing to the other corner of the room. He gave a laugh and looked around her booth to occupy himself while she was gone. The photos were of particular interest to him, and he studied a few of them closely. Most were taken in Hogwarts he realised, on the grounds or in the Ravenclaw Common Room, showing a large group of youngsters, all laughing and joking about. He gave a smile, looking at one of them featuring Tonks and three boys standing on what looked like a table, they were playing instruments while she was singing to a large crowd of students. He gave it a puzzled look, noticing several of these types of photos dotted about.

There was a sudden crash and the sound of breaking china, startling Remus. He looked over the top of the booths to see Tonks, crouching down on the floor picking up her coffee life form experiment. Such was the silence of the place that he could hear the mutters of the other late night Aurors, berating Tonks who was cleaning up silently.

He fought the urge to roll his eyes and was making back to examine the band photos closer when another photo caught his eye, it was obscured by many others, hidden beneath newspaper articles so only part of her face was visible.

He pushed another photo aside to reveal her in a pure gold sleeveless dress robe and he stared at it for a long time, taken aback for some reason, perhaps because he’d never seen her in anything other than heavy dark robes or muggle clothing. He noticed that her hand was clasping someone else’s and slowly he pushed aside a

cutting from the daily prophet to reveal her partner. An ill fitting dress robe, shock of ginger hair and giving a loving smile towards her, stood someone he had seen not three hours ago.

Charlie Weasley.

He gave it an incredulous look at the couple in the photo shared a kiss before being taken surprise for the second time that night by Tonks.

“Coffee?” asked a voice startlingly close behind him and he spun around guiltily.

She was holding two mugs of coffee and a carefully composed expression with revealed nothing except an arched eyebrow.

“Just admiring your photos,” he said hurriedly, feeling somehow as if he were 10 again, being caught doing something he shouldn’t have.

“I saw,” she said, handing him the mug and falling back into her seat.

He fell into his as well as if she had just commanded him to do so. He looked at her uncertainly.

“Graduation ball,” she said finally, nodding towards the photo he was looking at, giving him a small smile, “like my robe? It cost my dad about four months wages.”

“It’s lovely,” he said, feeling slightly relieved yet still strangely intimidated, “I didn’t realise you and Charlie Weasley used to be an item.”

“I don’t generally broadcast the fact,” she said, giving a sip of her coffee and a slight smile, “but yeah, we were. For about three years, on and off...”

“Really?” he asked, glancing back at the photo momentarily, “I’d never guess. Was it serious?”

“About as serious as you could get,” she said with a faraway look in her eyes, “We got engaged that night, thought we were old enough and grown up enough.”

She gave a bitter laugh and Remus regarded her with a shocked expression.

“I was accepted to the academy, he was offered a place with the Tornados, they said the national team was inevitable...” she gave a sigh, “we even went house hunting...”

She shook her head.

“What happened?” he asked, completely captivated.

“Dragon’s happened,” she said, giving him another rueful smile, “Romania happened, we split up like we often did and I met someone else. La di da di daa, the usual story - Molly still doesn’t much like me...”

“I noticed,” he said finally after he’d digested all of this, “but I never thought...So how is it working with him?”

“Most of the time it’s fine,” she said with a shrug, “I’ve moved on now, new interests.”

Remus looked at the photo again, wondering why he was so surprised about Tonks’ past, it happened quite often he remembered, there was always one couple in every year at Hogwarts who did something like that, got engaged at graduation, or married straight after they left.

In his year it was Lily and James.

“So, I’m sure you didn’t come here to talk about my love life, or lack thereof,” she said with a grin and he sensed that things were back to normal, “what can I do you for?”

“Several things actually,” he said, leaning forwards to business, “firstly might be explaining to the others where you were this evening?”

“This evening?” asked Tonks blankly.

“Meeting at HQ?” Remus reminded her as she realised what she’d done and gave a groan of frustration, “Molly cooked pasta.”

“Oops,” she said, smacking her forehead with her hands and proceeding to spill hot coffee onto her robes.

She gave a curse and kicked her feet from the desk, bringing them to the floor with a thump as she proceeded to shake her robes. There was a small landslide of parchment that slid across her desk, knocking a crystal ball that had been perched on a small stand, which began to roll off the desk.

Remus caught it before it hit the ground.

“Why is everything such a drama!” she asked, throwing her hands up with despair, and with a flick of her wand getting rid of the coffee stains, “good catch by the way.”

Remus chuckled and examined the ball, “I didn’t put you down for this sort of thing Tonks.”

“What? Oh that, it’s not a divination ball,” she said as she tried to tidy her desk, “look at it more closely.”

Remus peered into the clear depths of the ball, noticing there was something there, a swirl of light that seemed the change colour and glow as he twisted and tilted it in the light.

“Can you see that thing in the centre?” she asked, twisting in her seat to survey his reaction.

“Yes...what is it?” he asked in an awe filled voice.

She pushed herself away from the desk, chair rolling towards his and stopping with a snap. She plucked it out of his hand and stared into its depths reverentially, holding it up between them. She leaned closer to him secretively, and he couldn't help but do so to, intensely curious now.

"What is it?" he repeated in a whisper.

She looked up at him from under her eyelashes, face full of seriousness and he looked into her eyes, captivated. The mysterious glow of the ball reflected in them and Remus waited with baited breath.

"I don't know what this is," she said, cracking into a wide grin, "but it's neat huh?"

She spun backwards on the caster and he stared at her for a long moment, before beginning to laugh. She dropped the ball back onto the stand, laughing hard, both at the joke and his reaction and Remus couldn't help but follow suit, not remembering the last time he had felt so carefree in a long time.

"It's a paperweight I think," she said when the laughter had finally died down, "Geri's idea of a joke present I think – imagine trying to create some order in here..."

"Living proof that the chaos theory works," said Remus mildly, plucking at a few pieces of parchment, "how can you work in this?"

"I struggle by," she said, propping her feet back into the desk and flashing him a warm grin, "so, come on, there must be an important reason you dragged your arse halfway across the country in the dead of night to see me?"

There was a hint of a tease in her voice which Remus caught and duly noted.



“I had an idea that I wanted to run past you,” he said, leaning back in his own chair, “since we seem to have become leaders of the Where’s Harry hunt I thought you’d be the best person to talk to.”

“What’s the story?” she asked interestedly, attempting to drink her coffee again.

“Well, you remember that Cathy’s dad was arrested and we heard her mentioned on the television at your parents?” he began, “well, apparently the police are still trying to find her, they’ve made more appeals on tv and then there was this article today in one of the local papers.”

Remus handed a silent Tonks a scrap of newsprint and she quickly scanned through it. He knew there was nothing of interest there, nothing they didn’t really know already.

“Ok...”prompted Tonks, handing him back the article and taking a long swig of her coffee.

“Well, seeing as we seem to be getting nowhere with magic, Harry and Cathy are well and truly hidden from us for the time being, I was wondering whether perhaps a bit of muggle-magic cooperation might be in order?”

“What - go to the police?” asked Tonks in surprise.

“Yes, they’ve got resources I’m sure that can’t be fooled by Harry’s potions, perhaps what we need is a muggle perspective on this?” he asked her.

“Perhaps...but Cathy’s smart, she’s run away too many time to let herself get caught, especially by the police,” said Tonks thoughtfully.

Remus looked slightly glum, “Well...I just don’t know what else to do - we can’t find her using Bill’s muggle records and now we know Voldemort’s looking for him too.”

Tonks frowned too, noticing that Remus sounded almost desperate.

"Maybe the police is a good idea...I've seen them do this missing persons thing before, they could put her photo on telly, someone's bound to have seen them..."

"Do you think that'll work?" he asked hopefully.

"I don't see what harm it could do, as long as we don't mention Harry. I think we should try and hide this as best we can - could you imagine if the Prophet got hold of this after the Ministry fiasco?"

"Yes, perhaps I should run it past Dumbledore?" Remus asked.

"He'll be back tomorrow, we can ask him then?" Tonks suggested quickly.

"Done. I could really do with your help with this though Tonks," Remus told her, "your knowledge of the muggle world would be really useful, I'm afraid I'm a bit clueless."

"Well," she said, smoothing down her robe self-consciously, "I don't pretend to be an expert, but I'd love to help."

"Excellent!" said Remus happily, "I thought we pay a visit to the police headquarters tomorrow if Dumbledore gives the a-ok? Are you free?"

Tonks thought about her meeting with Gringotts and her shift at Azkaban and gave a sigh, as much as she'd love a legitimate excuse to meet up with Remus more often, her loan needed repaying before Goblins came and broke her kneecaps or something.

"I'm busy sorry," she explained awkwardly, "I don't finish till late tomorrow night."

"Oh right, of course," said Remus, looking slightly crestfallen.

“But I’ve got the morning off the day after,” she told him quickly, “I was going to catch up on some paperwork but this is more important.”

“Excellent,” he replied, rising to his feet and looking down at the card around his neck, “well, I better get going before the Department for Regulation and Control come and cart me away. See you tomorrow!”

“Bye Remus,” she called, watching him weave his way out of the booths and out through the door, large grin on her face.

She turned back to her files and tried unsuccessfully to concentrate on the latest Azkaban breakout tip-off. It had occurred to her suddenly that Remus’ reasons for visiting her so late at night were pretty poor.

AN/ Thank you so much for all the reviews - I can’t believe how many I have!

I’m surprised how many people said they usually hate O/C fanfics but liked this one - what makes Kitty so special?

I hope you all had an excellent Christmas and have a good New Year! Kitty would have spent hers waitressing for the double pay like me!

Thank you all 138 of my reviews! And...

Chrisgocountyjr, SilentWolf, benwa, Raie, Tersios, Lady Lestrangle, Morange, Ashley, FroBoy, Sterling-Ag, Ashleigh Harry Potter Fan (special hello for enthusiasm!), Suicidal Tears, drowninmybrain, Ryukanjin, Kyizi, john, johjo, realfanficts, kupchoi, enchantedlight, Jon (excellent review thanks!), harrison potter, Alphamech, Lu Ling Qi, AzureSky123, SlythsRule, nitigia, Seku238, InAshenSilence, Yoko Kitsune, John Steppenwolf (the Who and Stones rule, you’re so true! But Kinks dominate!)

## Chapter Fourteen

But my dreams,  
They aren't as empty,  
As my conscience seems to be.

Despite the sweltering heat of the midsummer's day, Tonks pulled the hood of her robe right over her face as she took the detour off Diagon Alley. Here the shops and were narrowly spaced, as if huddling together for mutual protection, none of them wanting to stand out and draw too much attention to itself.

As an Auror she was encouraged to routinely inspect Knockturn Alley, however, they were strongly discouraged from purchasing anything from the shops there and the last thing she needed was to lose her job at the ministry, there were already questions hanging over her about her participation in the Ministry incident in June.

To be sure she wasn't recognised she'd taken the form of a middle aged woman, but when she step over the threshold of the sombre looking shop named 'Boon and Banes', she allowed her own face to reappear. She glanced around, there was a single goblin sitting at a high stool behind a large oak desk. The shiny brass plate on it read Mr Shrankoal.

"May I help you?" he said in a silkily smooth voice that forcibly reminded Tonks of Snape.

"Yes, I'd like to arrange another loan please?"

The pointed face broke into a wide, humourless grin of satisfaction. She was beginning to hate that goblin and his expressions.

"Follow me," he sneered, sliding from his leather seat and pushing open a dingy door to the side.

Tonks squared her shoulders, swallowed her fear and stepped over the threshold.

Kitty hoisted a tray right over her head, shouting at the crowding customers as she tried to push through the crush. Above her the glasses clinked and the plates slid around the tray, but none of them fell and soon she was emerging into a clear path and the hungry customers.

“Ok, I’ve got two cokes, here you go, one cheeseburger, yeah, there you go,” she said quickly, dropping everything onto the table for the people, “and a plate of cheesy chips - enjoy!”

She turned away, tucking the tray under her arm as she brushed the sweat off her forehead. She hated working so much, every single second of it was torture and the only thing that carried her through the day was the thought that every minute was a minute closer to when she’d walk out of there. Harry was getting pretty insistent about leaving Wolverhampton now and she didn’t know how much longer she could put him off.

To avoid going back to the kitchens just yet, she began to needlessly rearrange the sauce pots, deep in thought. There was too much to do before they left. She wanted everything finished and done before she went, no loose ends, no history to catch up with her. This was her clean break.

A fresh start, the beginning of her life.

She’d been waiting 16 years for it to start and now it was days away.

“You Caz?”

The low voice startled her slightly but she showed now sign of surprise, carrying on arranging the sauce sachets.

“Who’s asking?” she merely said.

“I’m a mate of Jed,” he replied.

A momentary satisfied smile crossed her lips and she turned to face the guy standing behind her. He towered over her, flanked by two friends who didn't look that friendly.

"Is that right?" she asked, her voice cool, "Jed sent you did he? And why would he do that?"

"He said you'd help us out," replied the guy gruffly, obviously trying to intimidate her.

"Did he now?" she asked in a silky smooth voice, "Well that all depends on whether I'm the helpful type, and whether you're the grateful type."

He gave a grin, obviously impressed for some reason. Kitty was aware of the flash of gold teeth before the guy stood down, no longer looming over her. His two cronies even relaxed into a slouch and Kitty flipped the tray between her hands.

"I'm definitely the grateful type," the guy said, leering slightly as his two friends began to laugh.

Kitty began to laugh with him before suddenly stopping and regarding him stonily.

"That wasn't funny and that's never going to happen again, right?" she told him in a cold, hard voice, "I might decide I don't like you. I might decide I'm not feeling particularly helpful. Get it, fucker?"

The guy stared back at her, before holding up his hands in surrender.

"Sorry," he muttered and Kitty gave a quick nod.

"Now, as you can see I'm working. I'll meet you when I finish."

"When's that?"

“At five. There’s an alleyway just behind here,” she told him, already walking away, “and I only want you there, got it? Leave Beavis and Butthead here at home.”

The bottom lip wobbled ominously.

“Now you’re going to be good for you auntie Tonks aren’t you?” she asked James almost pleadingly, “I’ve got lots of work to do today so if you just-“

James began to cry.

Tonks felt like she might just join him and after giving a sigh she bent down into the crib.

“Hoop-la,” she said, picking him up and holding him towards her, “ssh ssh...don’t cry sweetie...”

This seemed to make matters worse and with a despairing look towards the pile of reports waiting to be read she began to pace the room.

“Poor little kid,” she murmured absentmindedly, looking towards the sun-filled garden, “all cooped up in here, you want to be outside playing don’t you?”

James must have understood this because the crying decreased and he looked at her with pleading, tear-filled eyes. Tonks felt her resolve to work weaken.

“You’re going to be quite the heartbreaker one day,” she told him with a laugh, to which he gave a happy hiccup.

A few minutes later there was a huge splash from the garden and the sounds of happy giggles filling the air.

“Oh no! Here comes the water-dragon! Hide hide!”

There was a realistic-sounding roar and more splashing, this time two sets of voices laughing and giggling.

Tonks couldn't help but have a good time, and even the guilt of knowing there was so much trouble brewing could hardly reach her on that gloriously sunny day. The small back garden to Geri and Steve's house was now home to a large yellow paddling pool, one parasol, one hyperactive infant, and one half-dragon half-human.

James slapped to water with his hands excitedly and Tonks shook her head, snout and pointed ears disappearing and being replaced by her natural features, to which the child gave a petulant look. He grabbed her nose with a pudgy hand and gave it a shake obviously calling for the return of the water dragon.

Ten minutes later Jamie had begun to calm down and Tonks settled back in the water, keeping an eye on him and enjoying the sun and secretly hoping this would aid in tanning her severely paled skin. She could have just made it tanned, but sometimes you had to put a bit of effort into your appearance.

She summoned over the reports she had to read and review and placed a waterproofing charm on them, before setting them on the grass.

"Repetio," she whispered, pointing her wand at them.

They gave a little jiggle and a male voice filled the air.

"Ministry of Magic, Department of Aurors, Sub-category Azkaban Prison, Confidential file 09-01-779, The monitorin' of tha..."

For some reason her charmed dictovoice always insisted on speaking in a heavily Scottish accent, and although she had at one point tried to change it, she had decided 'Geoff's' voice would do, she'd grown to love his quirky ways.

"Pause," she commanded suddenly, and Geoff fell silent, "Rectify: Read as ineffectual diotamolic resonance field, class CC9."



She checked the sheet, just to make sure Geoff was working as ordered, "Continue."

"...tha ineffectual diatamolic resonance field, class CC9, can be breached by tha uss of a..."

Tonks didn't catch the next bit because James was obviously aware of his lack of attention and had splashed her, and was now yanking a lock of her purple hair.

"Hey, Jim-Jerie," she scolded, easing her hair away from his grip, "that hurts; you've got to learn that you can't hurt people just like - Pause! Delete Prisoner Cell Block 13, Prisoner Alpha Gamma Theta, Read as Cell Block 13 and all associated inhabitants."

James looked at her nonplussed, as if the last bit of gobbledegook was more unintelligible than the previous lot. Tonks gave a sigh, wishing she could leave reports and work and guilt far behind for at least half an hour. She created a bubble with her wand and batted it towards James, who watched it open mouthed before grasping at it with his chubby hands.

He spent the next five minutes trying to destroy the charmed bubble, successfully getting Tonks soaked from head to foot, poking her in the eye twice, and mistaking her nose as the bubble on two separate occasions. This was interspersed with Tonks' corrections of the report, which was finally finished and placed to one side as Geoff read out a report on one of the newly identified Death Eaters.

Ding dong.

She dropped the bubble she was playing with and looked across to the house with a frown. Someone to spoil her fun...She climbed out of the pool and slipped into a pair of wrap around trousers, hoisting baby James out of the water too and balancing him on her hip. He was already beginning to grumble as she summoned the papers to fall silent and folded themselves into her hand – last thing she needed were people getting hold of confidential ministry reports.

She padded into the cool living room with wet feet, pausing to check she wasn't showing too much in the mirror. She wondered briefly whether she should put a shirt over her bikini top when the bell rang again and James grabbed a handful of her hair and gave a sharp tug. She prised it from his grip and walked to the front door, squinting through the peephole.

It was funny that how every time she saw Remus, her heart actually almost stopped beating for a moment, before doubling in speed painfully. Giving herself a shake of encouragement she reached for the latch, before hesitating a moment – and feeling slightly daring she tugged her bikini top down just a little, before opening the door.

Kitty had finished work finally and was fetching her bag out of her locker, folding up the 'Dino's' uniform and stowing it away, changing into her own clothes. She laced up her boots slowly, wanting to keep 'Jed's mate' waiting as long as possible. Finally she touched up her makeup in the mirror and let herself out the back way. The alleyway was only a minute away and she sauntered down to it, pulling her mobile out of her coat pocket and turning it off.

The nameless mate of Jed was sat on top of a dustbin at the very end of the alleyway, watching her approach as he swung his legs backwards and forwards, making loud banging sounds that echoed around the alleyway. When she was only a metre away she stopped, leaning against another bin and silently watching the guy.

"So how is my old friend Jed?" asked Kitty finally, pulling out a cigarette and lighting up.

"Okay," he replied, before giving a wide grin, "got nothing but rave reviews about you though."

"Oh really?" she replied, also grinning now, "well, I do love Jed."

He began to laugh, swinging his legs a bit more. Kitty noticed his eyes flicking occasionally around the alleyway.

“I’m Dijon by the way,” he said suddenly, before grinning wickedly, “like the mustard.”

“Well Dijon-like-the-mustard,” said Kitty, flicking her half finished cigarette to the floor, “I’m not one for chit chat you know, so let’s just get this over and done with, shall we?”

“So soon?” he practically purred, “I thought we could hang out a bit first babes?”

She narrowed her eyes at him dangerously.

“Babes?,” she questioned nastily, “You’ve obviously got a death wish Dijon-like-the-mustard. Call me that again and you’ll be sorry.”

“Sorry,” he apologised smoothly, sliding off the bin and stepping up towards her, “But you’re such a pretty girl-”

“I’m warning you,” she growled.

“It’s going to be such a wrench doing this,” he told her, stepping right up to her now, “but you really shouldn’t be messing with things you can’t handle.”

Kitty heard movement behind her and she knew that she’d been right thinking his cronies had been hiding in the alleyway all along. Dijon was laughing now as he loomed over her, reaching out...

The bin lid Kitty had been leaning against, hand firmly curled around the handle, was now wrenched up. With a yell she brought it swinging around and slammed it into the guys head. He went staggering to the floor, crying out more in surprise than pain. She crouched down and sat on his stomach, finger curling around his windpipe.

“Let’s start again babes,” she said sweetly, “shall we?”

Dijon struggled for a second but Kitty only squeezed harder and began to splutter.

“And you guys can back off!” she called, looking up fiercely to see the two cronies walking towards her.

They looked towards Dijon uncertainly.

“Do as she says,” he croaked out.

They stood down.

“Good, now we’re all getting along nicely,” Kitty told him happily, releasing the pressure around his windpipe only slightly, “tell me Dijon-like-the-mustard, you weren’t by any chance planning to do the dirty on me were you?”

He glared at her and she leant over him so her face was only inches from his own.

“Were you?” she demanded in a whisper.

“Not anymore,” he replied, glaring at her.

Kitty began to laugh.

“That’s better, now perhaps we can chat like the civilised human beings we are?” she said, releasing her grip and sitting up.

Dijon scrambled away from her and moved over to his friends, turning to watch her cautiously, hand rubbing his bruised head.

“You’re one crazy chick,” he muttered, “Jed was right.”

“Only when I’m being threatened,” Kitty replied, “God, you must think I’m really thick? A poor, sweet, innocent young girl wandering into a blind alley with a bunch of tossers hanging about. Give me a little more credit.”

Dijon smirked slightly, “Ok crazy chick, I’m feeling the respect - I definitely don’t want to get on the wrong side of you again...”

“Thanks Mr. Dijon, tell you’re friends won’t you?” she said sarcastically, “Now if you don’t mind, I gotta go see a man about a dog.”

“What? You’re leaving?” he asked incredulously.

“Dijon, you don’t think I’d stick around after you just tried to stitch me up?” she laughed incredulously.

“Come on crazy chick - we got off on the wrong foot,” he grinned, settling back into his smooth guy persona once more, “how about I make it up to you?”

“And how you gonna do that?” she asked him, pulling another cigarette out.

“How about a drink to start off with?” he suggested.

She regarded him for a moment, thinking about Harry.

“Just a little drinkie?”

“No way buddy,” she laughed, Harry would be waiting...

“Come on crazy chick! You need me as much as I need you!”

She paused, thinking hard.

“Just one?” he teased.

Kitty gave a slight grin, he was right of course, “Why not?”

“That’s the spirit!” he said happily, standing aside for her to walk out of the alleyway.

“But,” she said suddenly, reaching out and grabbing hold of his arm tightly, “anymore crap from you, and you’ll find out why I could walk

into this alleyway so confidently, all alone, apparently powerless. Right?”

“Right,” he said, wincing as her nails dug in, “no more crap, I promise.”

Of all the things to be greeted with at a front door, the sight of a semi-naked twenty something was not something Remus had expected. For a long moment he just stared at her, greeting dying in his throat as he took in the dripping purple hair, wide smile and tiny bikini top. He felt rather odd all of a sudden and was about to make a more in depth investigation about this when he registered the fact that the dripping purple hair was actually attached to a small fist, which was attached to similarly wet child.

“Wotcher Re – ouch – Remus,” she said, with a wide grin, trying to wrestle James’s grip from her hair which was now beginning to get painful.

He gave himself a mental shake and gave a wide smile, “Afternoon Tonks, bad time?”

“Never,” she laughed, stepping aside and pulling the door open, “come on in.”

“Thanks,” he said gratefully, walking through the doorway which began to wail.

“Not hiding any lethal weapons under all those layers are you?” she joked, tapping to doorframe with her wand which ceased to sound.

He wondered if that was supposed to be a double entendre.

“Just my wand,” he said easily, eyeing the door, “latest Ministry invention I see...”

“Excellent if you want to know if anyone’s carrying a wand,” she said in mock-appreciation, “amazing actually – a magical household in the

middle of a magical area of town, you never know who might have one...Its driving me crackers."

Remus laughed and Tonks flashed him a grin, which was interrupted by a loud wail from James, who still hadn't forgotten the scandal of being removed from the pool.

"And who's your new friend?" Remus asked, tickling under the baby's chin experimentally.

"I don't know, I just saw him outside this shop and had to have him," she began seriously.

"What?" he asked, eyebrows raised as she began to snicker.

"Ignore me. This is James," she said importantly, hoisting onto her hip a little better, "better known as Jimmy, don't want him getting ideas above his station, do we Jim-Jerie?"

The baby gave another wail and she rolled her eyes at Remus, "Belongs to Geri, she's gone to an emergency of some sort so guess whose babysitting the monster?"

He gave her a sympathetic look and turned to the baby, whose face was steadily turning deeper and deeper shades of red, fists balled up in anticipation.

"You want a drink?" she offered, completely oblivious to the mounting volcano she was holding onto.

"Tea would be nice," he accepted gratefully.

"Sugar, milk?" she inquired heading over to the kitchen as James burst into floods of tears.

"Just milk thanks," he replied, eyeing James worriedly.

"Sweet enough already eh?" she laughed.

He looked at her in surprise, but her back was turned and he couldn't assess whether there was actually a hint of flirtatiousness in her voice, or maybe it was her teasing him? He quickly told himself to snap out of it, he couldn't believe how sidetracked he was finding himself when faced with a bikini top. It must have been the English gentlemen in him that made him feel slightly embarrassed and the need to stare right at her face lest he be labelled a pervert.

She said something else to him but it was lost in the wails of James and she began to rock him gently, making all kinds of begs and pleads for his silence. Remus watched her with a smile on his face, thinking about how good she seemed to be with children, if he'd been holding onto that racket for any longer than a few seconds his ear drums would have quit without notice and he certainly wouldn't be cooing and laughing at it as she was. However, despite the calm outward appearance, he noticed that she looked slightly worn, with her sunny disposition and summery appearance hiding a multitude of stress lines, and pale skin.

"Jimmy, please," she begged, jiggling him again before catching Remus' eye and averting her gaze bashfully, "he's not usually this bad...I've been trying to get some work done today but he's a sucker for attention..."

Eventually she gave a disheartened sigh, motioning to the cups and then to the door. Remus grabbed them and followed her out into the garden, placing them on the table as she put James back into the small paddling pool.

The crying ceased almost instantaneously and Remus stared at the baby in surprise, how could it just switch off like that? Tonks was bent over the edge of the pool, splashing and playing with the baby now.

"You look a bit tired Tonks," he said, although he would have gladly swapped the term 'bit tired' for 'shattered' or 'stressed out'.

"Very late night," she merely said, batting away his concern, before adding with a laugh, "so late it could be classed as early morning."



He gave a chuckle and sipped the tea as Tonks splashed James a bit more.

“Working at the Ministry?” he asked her sympathetically.

“Azkaban actually,” she said with a sigh, “I’m one of the only part time guards there so travelling really takes it out of you...plus we’re still trying to get rid of the spooky Dementor vibes.”

“Yes, I’ve heard their presence can linger for some time,” he said, remembering the article he’d read not two days ago.

“Tell me about it, I’m convinced there’s one hanging around, or maybe just hanging around me,” she joked, although he could tell there was a glimmer of worry in her statement.

“What’s it like over there?”

A shadow seemed to settle over her face for a second and there was a definite lacklustre in the splashing of water on James.

“Awful. You just can’t imagine what it must have been like for...” she said quietly and Remus knew who she was referring to, “Let’s just put it this way, I would rather kill myself than be sent there.”

He could tell she really meant it too.

James gave a sudden screech and they all jumped, alerted by the sound of a bell tinkling in the living room. Tonks and Remus both looked up and she gave another sigh.

“Another fantastic Ministry invention,” she said, rolling her eyes and climbing to her feet, “a doorbell for the fireplace...honestly. Can you watch James for me a mo?”

As with that she was gone, jogging into the house leaving Remus alone with James, a boy whose lung capacity seemed to actually be greater than his body mass. It took him only a second to realise that

the person responsible for the splashing had disappeared and Remus watched with a sinking heart and the face slowly turned red...

Meanwhile, Tonks had bent over to see a head arriving in the flames, which gave a dizzy, sickened look before noticing her brightly.

“Ah, Nymphadora,” said the man jovially and Tonks fought to restrain the correction, “not too busy I see?”

He was staring at the bikini and she gave a frown, trust her boss to completely overlook the fact that even on her day off she was working.

“What can I do for you Sir?” she asked him politely.

“Well-”

There was a sudden piercing scream from the garden and Tonks heaved a sigh, with a look over her shoulder she saw Remus desperately trying to shush the baby, and with a grin she turned back to the fire.

“Sorry about that Sir,” she said without explanation, “continue.”

“Well...” he said, looking slightly unnerved by Tonks’ sudden acquisition of a baby, “I’ve got some files here I would like you to take a look over – we’re investigating the possible connection between these people suspected of Dark Activity associated with You-Know-Who,” he said, as a hand and a large sheaf of parchment suddenly arrived in the fire too, “I knew you wouldn’t mind.”

Well she couldn’t say no, so she merely gave a weak smile and picked up the black metal tongs for the fire, prising the notes out of his hand and blowing at the smouldering edge of one.

“Try and get something by tomorrow,” he said, with a slight despairing tone in his voice.

“Of course Sir,” she said, stepping back as the man’s head disappeared from view.

She gave the fire a furious look.

“Yes Sir, no Sir, three bags full Sir,” she chanted, hoisting the pile of parchment up and collecting the others from the desk she had to work on.

Marching back into the garden with a rather evil look on her face, she was all ready to make her excuses and lock herself away in her room for the rest of the day when she was suddenly sidetracked by the sight that greeted her. Remus had somehow been soaked from nearly head to toe in the time she'd been away and was now standing with his back to her, holding James. The baby had ceased to cry and was now lying with his cheek on Remus' shoulder, little hand tugging at his robes as Remus spoke to him in a low voice.

Tonks couldn't help but smile to herself, heart speeding up even more than usual and she watched Remus, feeling that if she wasn't already, she could quite easily fall in love with him all over again right then. There was something about watching him when he didn't realise people were watching, he always acted completely different.

Giving a resolute shake of her head and trying to banish the flushed cheeks she walked back over to him.

“That's the first time he's shut up since I moved in,” she whispered in a low voice, unwilling to break the spell.

Remus looked at her in surprise, obviously not hearing her coming, before looking down at the floor almost bashfully.

“I think he tired himself out soaking me,” he replied in a low voice, giving her a smile that could melt knees.

“How do you do it?” she said, shaking her head in amazement as James' eyes drooped shut.

“I don't know, it's a gift I guess,” he joked with a Sirius-like smile.

“Sure is,” she agreed emphatically, “come and put him in the cot and he can have a good sleep.”

She led the way into the house, the sudden rush of emotions she’d felt just then making her extremely sensitive to everything that was going on. She was amazed she only tripped once, on the rug, and didn’t babble too much.

Once in the baby’s room, Remus laid him down in the cot, tucking the blankets around him as they both leaned on the railings and watched him sleep.

“I like babies when they’re quiet and asleep,” she commented after a while, flashing him a small smile.

“Yeah, it’s when they start walking and talking it’s the problem,” he commented, studying the small broomstick that was hanging from the mobile a little too intently.

“No doubt,” she agreed, trying not to watch him too obviously, but finding herself unable to stop.

“I remember Harry when he was this small,” he said after a while, “quietest baby I ever saw, James used to moan about how they had a mute for a son.”

Tonks laughed appreciatively, finding the reminder of Remus’ age grounding her romantic thoughts quite satisfactorily. He didn’t follow this up with another comment however and she looked at him again, as if suddenly noticing something was amiss, before she realised what it was; he looked sad.

She didn’t know whether this was because of Harry, or because of James, or whether he was sad about the fact he’d never had children.

“We’ll find him Remus,” she said in a quiet voice eventually, leaning her chin on her arms on the cot railings.

He was silent for a long time, watching James sleep.

“That’s not what I’m worried about.”

“What are you worried about?” she asked as the both straightened up.

“That he won’t want to come back. That we won’t be the first people to find him. His reasons for leaving...”

Tonks sighed deeply, understanding and sharing Remus’ worry.

“And...,” he mused, almost to himself, “we didn’t part on the best of terms.”

“Harry’s just...angry right now,” she said, “and guilty and scared...”

He merely nodded and she wasn’t really sure if he’d taken what she’d said onboard. Eventually he turned around and they both walked towards the door. She laid a consoling hand on his arm.

“Try not to worry just yet,” she said softly, “not until we’ve got cause to – Harry’ll be back.”

He nodded mutely, looking down at her hand for a moment. She removed it quickly, suddenly highly embarrassed. There was an uncomfortable air around the place and she felt like she’d suddenly been found out, like she’s laid herself out too much and now he knew everything – suddenly the bikini wasn’t such a good idea.

“I’m just gonna go and...” she began, cheeks flushing darkly, “get a towel.”

She darted away into her room, pausing for a moment to lean against the door and clam herself down. What was wrong with her? She was letting her feelings rule over her to the point where she could hardly be bothered to take interest in anything else, and it had to stop.

She straightened her shoulders and rubbed her face quickly, as if trying to rid herself of all her embarrassment and feeling in one go.

On impulse she decided to get changed, quickly pulling her jeans on, before putting on a blue shirt. She checked herself in the mirror, staring at her reflection for a long time, just thinking.

Eventually she gave a concentrated frown and the hair lengthened past her shoulders, before slowly turning a pale blue. She'd never tried it before as a colour, but she felt slightly subdued now and it seemed to reflect her mood.

Picking up a towel, she wrapped her hair up into a turban and collected more folders. Squaring her shoulders yet again, she walked out of the room, giving a slightly apprehensive look around the living room. No sign of Remus.

She gave a sigh, realising he'd left. At least she was free to catch up on the veritable mountain of work she had to do. She dropped all the files on the table, picking up a collection of coffee mugs that were in varying states of mould and wandered towards the kitchen, nose buried deep in a file on the proposed new household protection charms the Ministry were investigating.

“Sugar?”

Tonks gave a yelp, dropping not only the file, but also the coffee mugs onto the tile floor, which shattered with a resounding crash. Remus jumped backwards too and Tonks was suddenly blinded by the towel falling in front of her eyes.

“Remus!” she practically shouted, struggling to pull the towel away and take in the situation, “you scared the hell out – I thought you'd left!”

“Sorry, no,” he said quickly, obviously taken aback by her shock, “I was just...making tea.”

“Yeah, of course,” she said, shaking her head and trying to clear up the confusion, “I'm just...ok. You surprised me. Yes, one sugar please.”

He stared at her blankly for a second, before noticing she'd finished rambling and had made a request. He gave a nod and turned back to the cups as she began to clear up the broken crockery. With a flick of the wrist the cups were remade and she placed them in the sink, before turning to Remus, who was holding out a cup of tea for her.

"Thanks," she said, making a concerted effort to calm herself down in any way possible.

"No problem," he said, taking a sip before giving her a steady look, "are you ok Tonks? You seem a bit-"

"What?" she said quickly, too on edge to calm down for a minute.

"Stressed?" he hinted, as if her last comment had cemented the fact.

She gave a hasty nod, sipping a mouthful of burning tea before shrugging, "Work, you know how it is."

"I don't think I do," he said, with another Sirius-like smile and she gave a hollow laugh.

"Yeah, I guess. Well count your lucky stars. First day off I've had in two weeks and I've got an absolute ton of stuff to get through for tomorrow," she complained, reasonably satisfied with the way she'd covered her situation.

"Are you sure you've not taken too much on?" he asked her, looking worried for the first time.

"Nah, don't be silly," she said dismissively, "nothing I can't handle right? It's just the deadline you know, and that was my boss on the floo just now, more stuff for tomorrow. No problem, just another all-nighter. I'm quite tempted to keep you around, just in case James wakes up again."

He gave a laugh, "I could stay and help you if you liked? I've got nothing to do and was going to bother you with work anyway...if you need an extra pair of eyes?"

“What, to do my files?” she asked blankly.

“Of course, forget I mentioned it,” he said quickly, “I realise you must have to do-”

“No - I’d love the help,” she cut in, “if you can stand the boredom that is?”

He gave a mild smile and twenty minutes later she found herself sitting at the dining room table, cup of coffee in hand as she discussed the finer points of the Ministry Housing Spells and the Azkaban Guard Issue with him. Two hours later she realised they’d made significant headway into her assigned work and she couldn’t help but marvel at the power two brains had over one. It was only the frequent interruptions of James that shattered the intense working aura of the room and before long Tonks was sliding a plate of pizza between them as a dinner substitute.

“I tell you what, let’s take a quick break,” Remus said, leaning back and rubbing his eyes, “I can hardly see straight now.”

“I know, if I see one more sentence beginning with the words ‘The Ministry of Magic recommends...’ I swear I’ll go mad,” said Tonks, throwing down her own file and picking up a slice of pizza.

“I never thought being an Auror involved five hours of paperwork every night,” he agreed, “I don’t know how you do it...especially these Civilian Brainchild Reports.”

“Eugh, don’t remind me,” she said, scrunching up her nose, “file after file of shopkeepers or herbologists deciding they’ve suddenly thought up a brilliant new way to do something every single brain in the Ministry has never managed to come up with...”

“Everyone’s an expert,” he said wisely, before stretching and reaching for a slice of pizza, “what have you been working on?”



A small part of her realised that what she was doing was technically illegal, passing on classified information to people outside the Ministry, but on the other hand she reasoned, this was Remus...Order business. She pulled a red file from underneath the pile she had in front of her and flicked it open.

“Brandon Saracen,” she read out from the top page, “has a brother, Klaus, who’s in my wing, caught him myself six months ago. We finally pinned a couple of counts of actual bodily harm on him, threats, hexes, curses, imperio but that’s not what he’s good for.”

“Why, what was he into?” asked Remus, leaning forward.

“Let’s just call it the vice trades shall we?” she said meaningfully, eyebrow raised, “I wanted him on that so badly...my main witness conveniently ‘accidentally’ cut her throat week before the trial – couldn’t make it stick...”

Remus shook his head, not really needing to say anything to this, “Why’s the ministry interested in Brandon?”

“Well, we think he’s planning another breakout, the Death Eaters are all in on it, apparently he’s a fully paid up member,” said Tonks with a dark look at the file, “not really surprising, they’re probably all customers of his.”

“Do you know when?” Remus asked, tearing off a piece of his crust and munching on it thoughtfully.

“That’s what I’m trying to find out,” she said, rubbing her eyes wearily, “he’s a clever one, but they always make mistakes...I’m only worried that he’ll take a few of his mates with him, Malfoy mainly.”

“They’re friends?” he asked.

“Neighbours on my wing,” she told him grimly.

“Malfoy’s on your wing?” he asked in surprise, “how is he?”

Tonks looked at him curiously, before joking, "You sound like you care. He's quite quiet at the moment, still the arrogant prick we all know and hate though," she sighed, lifting her boots up onto the table, "has perfected the art of Tonks-bashing lately so he must be on the mend."

"Really?" frowned Remus.

"Nothing I can't handle right?" she suggested playfully, "it's the only thing interesting that happens all day usually and I get my revenge one way or another."

He merely laughed and Tonks' memory walked her down her corridor at Azkaban, listing the names of everyone in the cells. She almost forgot Remus was there, settling into her usual studying methods of leaning as far back on her chair than was probably necessary and humming to herself.

"I was actually over to talk about the Harry situation," he said from a long way away and she refocused on him slowly.

"Sorry, I completely forgot you weren't over to do my paperwork!" she laughed, "what's the news?"

"Well, wandering around the city centre of Wolverhampton isn't really helping," he said with a sigh, "and Bills got a list of about 7000 possible classmates of Cathy's to investigate. I was just wondering if you had any ideas to speed things up?"

"I take it the locator spells didn't work?" she asked, having quickly remembered that she'd missed last night's attempt to perform the complex charm.

"No," he said heavily, "we just got a blank space. I think he's found someone to do some kind of complex concealment charm on him that makes him unplotable."

"Really?" asked Tonks in surprise, "well, who could have done that?"

“Moody reckons someone on Diagon Alley.”

“Yes, there’s a few places down there where enough gold will buy you anything,” she suggested, slightly impressed by Harry’s forethought, “we should go down there and do some interviews. He must have visited the Alley lately, and Gringotts.”

“I’ll go there then and make some inquiries,” he said, not noticing Tonks’ slightly bitter look at the mention of the bank.

“No need, just plot Cathy, wherever she is Harry’ll be.”

“We already tried,” he said heavily, “she’s unplottable too.”

“What!” cried Tonks, even more shocked now, “that’s not possible!”

He gave a shrug and she looked about for a few seconds as if searching her memory for something well hidden.

“The only way you can make a muggle unplottable though is...a complex charm, which I really don’t think Harry could do, and he couldn’t have taken her into Diagon Alley” she told him, “the only way left then is a potion?”

“Must have been the potion, the page from Harry’s log book says he hasn’t used magic outside school since this time last year with the Dementors,” Remus replied, pulling out the battered page from his pocket and showing her.

“He made her drink a potion then?” she said in surprise, “that was dangerous...do you think he’s told her about the magical world then?”

“I don’t know, perhaps,” Remus mused, “it would explain how they’re both unplottable...”

“Well, how are we going to find them now?” she sighed heavily, “all I can see happening now is us bumping into him by mistake in the city. Not likely...”

“I know, and the police got us nowhere...” sighed Remus, “they don’t really seem to care do they?”

“Just another runaway to add to their list,” Tonks told him, “in the muggle world there’s a stupid number of people going missing every week, 150 or something...”

“That many!” exclaimed Remus, looking shocked.

“The muggle population’s a little larger than the magical one,” she reminded him, “and most of the time the missing persons are just people that no one misses.”

“No one seems to be actively trying to find Cathy apart from us,” agreed Remus, “you’d think her family would try...”

“Well, she’s only got the half-brothers now and one of them is newly deceased,” she said, motioning to her scarred shoulder.

“Grandparents then, friends of the family, school friends,” wondered Remus, “someone must care that she’s gone.”

Tonks sat in silence for some time, contemplating the idea of someone being missing, having disappeared, being dispossessed. For some reason this last word wouldn’t leave her and she wondered about the loneliness of the life of someone without any connections, with no help, no love.

Who is dispossessed.

“Do you think-” she began before a sudden noise made her pause.

A crackling filled the air and both her and Remus looked confused for a moment.

“Tonks, get down here now, we’ve got a serious situation.”

She jumped up at once, already grabbing her wand and making her way over to the fireplace.

“What is it? What’s happened?”

“There’s been another breakout from Azkaban.”

Kitty’s new job meant that Harry had eight hours of the day to himself to fill until either she, Donna or Greg got back to the flat and that gave him an extraordinary amount of time to think. Most of this was taken up by rereading Quibell’s letter and thinking about Sirius. Now he’d spoken to Kitty about it, his initial thoughts that it was a trap or hoax on the part of Voldemort seem to have come back, but the grief and pain of Sirius being gone seemed to outweigh this. A little part of his mind kept whispering, ‘what if it’s not a hoax...how can you ignore this?’ And this was the reason why after having the letter for almost two weeks now, he still hadn’t visited the man.

He had also returned to his past obsession he’d had whilst at Privet Drive, trying to repair Sirius’ two way mirror. Nearly half of it was glued back together, but it would never show a true reflection, there was too much glue on the surface for a start and the shattered pieces were so small that when he looked into it, he just saw a thousand portions of his face blinking back. And no sign of Sirius.

However, tonight he couldn’t concentrate on the mirror, he couldn’t read his defence textbook, he couldn’t even watch the tv.

Because Kitty was missing.

Her shift at work had finished nearly three hours ago and she said she’d come right back. Her mobile was off and when he’d called her workplace they said she’d left long ago. Harry didn’t think he’d ever felt more panicked, more sick...

It was Voldemort, they’d found her brother and now they’d got her, they’d taken her and now...

Now...

He couldn't even bare to think of what was happening and jumped up from the sofa again, pacing the room. There must be a way he could use magic to find her he thought desperately, wishing he had more books with him, a simple location spell perhaps.

You made her untraceable, remember Harry?

His mind whispered at him through the gale of terrified thoughts and he stopped pacing instantly, staring unseeingly at the wall - why did he do that? How could he have made her untraceable? Now even if he did manage to contact the Order and get them here, they wouldn't be able to find her...

Voldemort had her...Voldemort had her...

The words kept repeating in his head over and over and he was unaware of anything around him, time passing, the fact his wand was in his hand now, twirling in his fingers, that he was just pacing on a small patch of carpet, making himself dizzy.

Suddenly he heard a key scrape in his lock and he ran to the door as fast as he could, wrenching it open desperately to see Greg standing on the doorstep, smiling bemusedly at Harry.

"Not who you expected?" he asked genially, before stepping in and catching sight of Harry face, "What's wrong?"

"Have you seen Kitty?" he asked desperately, trailing after him as he walked into the lounge.

"No, isn't she at work?" he said, dropping his bag on the floor and turning to look at Harry again.

"She finished three hours ago!" he told him in a panicked voice that sounded completely unlike his own.

“She’s probably just gone to see some mates Harry,” laughed Greg at his apparent over exaggeration

Harry gaped at him for a moment before shaking his head vehemently.

“She would have told me, something’s happened to her, I know it!”

Greg simply chuckled.

“Calm-a-llama-down Harry, where’s the emergency?” he said, before noticing the mix of fury and utter panic on Harry’s face and placing a hand on his shoulder.

“Harry,” he said in a despairing voice, “Caz doesn’t have to tell you where she is at every second of the day, ok? That’s girls for you, Donna disappears for whole afternoons at a time without a word, right?”

“But-”

“Come on Harry, you’re just stressed because you’ve been spending so much time together and now she’s working, right? Caz is probably having a drink with her work friends. How about we get a couple of cans and watch the match - Man U versus Arsenal, FA cup final?”

“No, we have to go and find Kitty!” Harry said, wanting to knock Greg’s head against the table for his stupidity - football? At a time like this?

Greg gave a heavy sigh.

“If she’s not back in an hour, I promise you I will personally drive us around the entire city until you find her ok?” he said, giving Harry another sympathetic look, “Until then, lets just sit down and relax?”

“Fine, sit and watch football, I’m going out!” he said loudly, grabbing his jacket and making for the door.

“She’s got you whipped Harry!” Greg called over his shoulder, laughing as he settled in front of the tv and Harry merely swallowed back the angry retort.

He grabbed the spare keys from the coffee table and hurried towards the door, wondering where on earth he was going to start. Maybe if he stood in the middle of some muggle place and started shooting off magic everywhere the Death Eaters would be there in no time. But then again, it was more likely that the Ministry or Aurors would be get there first...

The same applied if he tried to shoot off the Dark Mark - how come Voldemort always knew how to find him, but when he actually wanted to be caught he didn’t even know how to begin arranging it?

He was just walking to the front door when the bell rang and he stood stock still for a moment.

“See, told you so!” shouted Greg from the living room, “there’s she is, forgotten her key!”

Harry darted forwards and pulled open the front door to find two boys a few years older than him standing there, in between which, was Kitty.

His heart nearly exploded with relief.

“You ‘arry?” asked one of them gruffly.

“Yeah...” he said in a strangled voice, moving forwards to look at Kitty properly.

She seemed to be held up by the two boys and had a really strange expression on her face.

“This is your’s then,” the taller of the two said, pushing Kitty forwards.



“Harry!” she said delightedly, as if she’d just seen him.

She stepped forwards towards him and attempted to wrap her arms around his neck, but failed miserably, stumbling suddenly so that Harry had to move quickly to avoid her dropping to the floor. He pulled her upright, arms wrapped tightly around her waist as she giggled madly.

“Oops, clumsy me!” she crooned happily.

Harry looked at her for a moment before turning furiously to the two boys.

“What have you done to her?” he demanded furiously.

“We aint done nuffin to her,” one said in what Harry assumed was supposed to be a threatening manner, “can we help it if she can’t hold her stuff?”

She was drunk? Harry looked down at Kitty incredulously who was looking at Harry with unfocused eyes as if she wasn’t actually seeing him, pupils tiny pinpricks of black in her overlarge blue eyes. That’s where she’d been? Drinking as he sat here planning to hand himself over to Voldemort? The previous terror he’d felt was soon matched by an equal amount of anger, no...fury...

“Ere’s her bag,” said one, trusting something towards Harry, “got all her gear in it, check it if you want, we dint steal nuffin.”

“What?” Harry asked quickly, least worried about this than anything, “Does it look like I care! Get lost!”

He slammed the door on the pair and looked down at Kitty who was sagging in his arms slightly.

“Did I do bad Harry?” she giggled, eyes sliding over his furious expression.

He didn't say anything, he was so angry he could feel his hands shaking, so relieved he felt like his heart was pumping and ten times the normal speed.

"I'm so happy to see you again!" she said happily, leaning forwards and trying to kiss him.

He merely moved his head away from her silently.

"Harry," she pouted, "don't be mean!"

"Where've you been?" he asked her in as steady a voice as he could manage.

"Working!" she giggled, before her eyes drooped suddenly and her knees buckled slightly, "Ooh, I don't feel too good...Stop throwing me about..."

"I'm not," he told her, "you're stumbling all over the place."

"What about you, you're not even in focus..." she said dazedly.

"Come on, let's get you to bed," he told her, wrapping her arms around his neck so he could carry her properly.

Kitty however, seemed to be too drunk to do anything now because she basically stopped using her legs and Harry had to fight to hold her up. He shouted to Greg who walked in, took one look at Kitty and gave a big frown.

"So, that's where she was? Donna'll love this," was all he said.

He and Harry wrapped their arms around her waist and walked her to the bedroom.

She was unconscious by the time they got to the bedroom, laying her out on her bed. Greg stood back as Harry worked at taking her shoes off and positioning her so she could properly breathe and everything.

When he was finished he pulled the blanket over her and sat back on his hunches, watching her for some time.

“She’ll be out now till tomorrow,” said Greg in a hard voice, “you know how this goes, right?”

“Right,” said Harry in a hollow voice.

“Don’t worry, I’ll tell Donna,” he said, “best leave her be...Why don’t you come and watch the match now?”

“Maybe in a minute...” he said and Greg gave a shrug, leaving the room.

Harry sat watching Kitty, unable to comprehend that a few short minutes ago he was prepared to cast a Dark Mark, prepared to get himself captured by Voldemort, the Death Eaters, Ministry Aurors, just to find her...and all the time she was out drinking herself into a stupor? How could she do that to him? She knew he was petrified of them being caught, something happening to her and she purposely went out, turned her phone off, didn’t leave any word...

Just to drink?

“How could you do that to me?” he asked out loud, staring at her unconscious form.

He leant forwards, chin in hands as he watched her sleep, deep in thought.

AN/ Well there we go, first post of the New Year! And a happy one I hope it is too!

Thought I’d shock you all out of your safe ideas about my characters, anyone that knows any of my other stories will know I quite like putting my characters through the emotional wringer and it’s all speeding up from here I promise!

Thank you everybody for all the reviews, look at how many I have grins , I feel so loved! Especially...

harrison potter, Calen, korrd, Mark Turnlach, enchantedlight, goofball44306, Jon, xZwergX, itsmeagain, fhippogriff, Cail Jol, Smurkle Snap, me (Answer; this isn't a Harry/Tonks ship!), nefariousfixation, Ladieraiel, yuiop, Dark-Syaoran, john, Arya (special thanks for wonderful review!), nitigia, realfanficts, InAshenSilence, AzureSky123, MaMoray, your story's cool, Duo, Jeefus, Alphamech, kupchoi, DrakeHouse and Kyizi

And to John Steppenwolf do you also know the second connection between the Kinks and Stones, for a very short time Rod Stewart played with the band back when they were the Ravens!

## Chapter Fifteen

I've just come back from fantasy,  
Right back to reality.  
Stayed away too long but now I've found,  
My world is turning upside-down.  
I don't fit in, but I don't stand out,  
I should stay cool, but want to shout.

Harry stood at the kitchen counter, sipping on a cup of bitter black coffee, staring unseeingly at the wall ahead as his throbbing scar took over his senses. He had spent the entire night sitting at Kitty's bedside, thinking, until he finally fell asleep in the early hours, right where he sat. And now he was awake, he was left him feeling sick, depressed, but most of all angry and he didn't like where his head and heart were leading him. All he could think about was her, missing without a word, slurring her words and stumbling over, passing out...

Donna had been right when she said all that time ago that he'd see a different side to Kitty. His hand clenched painfully around the cup as he realised he didn't like what he saw, but not even that, he couldn't stand what he saw.

He heard a noise behind him, someone walking into the kitchen and he tensed up instantly. However, he soon heard the sound of a baby gurgling and realised with a sinking heart and flash of thanks that it was only Donna.

"You're up early," she said.

"Couldn't sleep," he replied, still facing the wall - he didn't think he could take looking at her right now.

"I'm not surprised," she said, standing beside him and reaching past to flick on the kettle, "are you okay?"

"Fine," he said stiffly, turning away from her overly close position and walking over to the kitchen table.

He heard her gave a sigh and they were surrounded by a lingering silence for a few minutes as Harry drank his coffee and she waited for the kettle, playing with Jason the whole time but stealing glances at him. Finally she sat down opposite him and gave a brief glance over in the direction of the bedroom before looking back at him.

“Are you okay?” she repeated, doing a good impersonation of being worried.

“Yes. I’m fine.”

“Are you sure,” she continued, “because you’ve been tapping that spoon on the table for about five minutes and its getting a bit irritating.”

Harry looked down in surprise at the teaspoon in his hand - where had that come from? He dropped it with a clatter but said nothing, still staring at his mug.

“Listen, she’s going to be fine - you know Caz, she bounces back quick enough from this sort of thing,” she said soothingly.

Harry wanted to tell her this was exactly not what he wanted to hear - he wanted her to tell him this was the first time anything like this had happened, that she was as mystified and shocked by her sudden turn in behaviour than he was.

“She’ll be up and about by tonight,” she continued, trying to fill in the silence, “none the worse for it - save for a few less brain cells I guess.”

She gave a laugh to indicate she was joking, but Harry could only swallow the lump in his throat. As much as he distrusted Donna and hated giving her ammunition in her apparent quest to break them up, he had to ask her...

“Donna, how often does Kitty, you know, do that?” he asked awkwardly, looking up to her briefly.

He could even see the glint in her eye, she knew she'd found a way in, the crack in their relationship she'd been looking for, but he didn't care anymore.

"Honestly?" she asked, dipping the plastic spoon into Jason's breakfast and trying to feed him, "I've only seen it about four or five times, I never usually hang out with her when she gets in one of those phases."

"Why not?" he asked, as his heart plummeted.

"Because things like last night happen," she said simply, shooting him a glance, "she always lets you down Harry, no matter how many chances you give her."

Harry gave an irritated sigh, standing up and walking over to the kettle and flicking it on again - he couldn't take this all in.

"She's an alcoholic then?" he asked her in a hollow voice.

"Alcoholic?" Donna asked, as if she didn't understand.

"Yeah," he said, staring at the teapot, already knowing the answer.

"Wha - oh..." she began, as if something had just occurred to her, "Right...Caz has been doing it since before I knew her...gets it from her mom..."

"Right..."

"They're more alike than she thinks," she added heavily, "or at least, more alike than she'll admit - she'll hate herself for this because it'll just remind her of her mom, and then she'll do it again, to try and forget."

Harry didn't think he could bare the thought of having to worry about Kitty like the way he did last night, having to wait for her not knowing if she was capable of making her way home...

“You didn’t know?” she asked suddenly, slightly incredulously, “but I thought she’d have...I just assumed you would...”

Harry was aware of a rattling noise and looked down quickly to see his hands and coffee cup was shaking. Giving them a slightly blank look he laid them flat on the table and tried to breath deeply but he just couldn’t stop the feeling of anger and panic overtake him - how could she do that to herself, how could she do that to him, not tell him? He had the horrible feeling that the Kitty he thought he knew was quickly being pulled away from him and being replaced by this new, foreign and slightly scary version.

“I tried to tell you,” said Donna softly, surprising him by being right behind his shoulder, “that day, I told you that you had no idea what she’d done, what she was capable of doing.”

Harry stared at the wall still, as Donna’s words crept into his mind, he could already feel the doubts growing, those tiny niggling thing that he used to brush aside, now they seemed to build, stack one upon the other. His scar gave a vicious throb and without even thinking about it he raised his cool fingertips to it and tried to smooth away the headache.

He felt like everything was building up, the nightmares, the visions, the anxiety - how could he figure out what he was supposed to do with his life, how he was supposed to evade the Order, the Death Eaters, Voldemort, his past, when he had to deal with holding Kitty’s life together, trying to look after the both of them?

Why did bad things have to always happen to him? This was his big chance, his new break, clean start to life and where was he - stuck circling the drain again, waiting for Kitty to get to bad to handle?

“Are you okay?” came a voice from far away and a comforting hand was placed on his shoulder.

Harry shrugged off Donna’s hand and marched into the lounge, grabbing his bag and jacket.



“You’re leaving?” asked Donna in surprise, leaning against the door and fixing him with an almost smug look.

Harry gave her a look that obviously said ‘what does it look like’, shrugging on his coat silently.

“She’ll be pissed off when she wakes up,” pointed out Donna, watching him lacing up his boots.

Harry felt like yelling right there and then than she didn’t even know the meaning of pissed-off, because whatever she would feel, it’d be nothing to how he felt at the moment.

“Are you coming back?” she continued, seemingly uncaring of his answer.

“I’ll be back later,” he said stiffly, marching towards the door.

He wrenched it open and stormed through, slamming it shut with a resounding bang.

Donna gave a sigh and wandered back over to Jason, who had been watching the two’s discussion in wide-eyed curiosity.

“Oh dear oh dear Jase,” said Donna, hoisting up the baby and balancing him on her hip, “looks like there’s trouble in paradise.”

Harry didn’t return to the flat until nearly 9 ‘o’ clock that night, having spent the day sitting in a local park, debating what to do. He was still furious with Kitty and now he was also, for the first time, questioning what he was doing with her. It had been such a whirlwind since he’d met her, knowing her only a few hours before they ran away, and he’d always assumed that this was just the right thing to do, because his heart told him it was right.

But now...now he’d seen a whole different side to Kitty, one he didn’t really know existed, or had never wanted to acknowledge the fact could exist despite evidence. She’d always drank a bit too much for

him, and sure they'd had night's where they'd been drunk together, but he'd never seen her like that. Never known her just disappear without him, going out with some rough looking lads who didn't even seem to really know or care about her.

The same thought had been running around his head all that night he'd sat up watching her and all that day he'd spent staring at nothing as he sat on his bench - he didn't know Kitty. Who was she? All these hints Donna had been dropping, maybe she wasn't just being vindictive, she knew Kitty so much better than him, perhaps she was right...perhaps Kitty really was bad news.

He had left Privet Drive and the magical world because he couldn't cope with what he had to think about and do there, and now he'd just jumped out of the frying pan and into the fire. Even so, he couldn't comprehend saying goodbye to her, the terror of thinking she'd been taken last night was enough to convince him that he couldn't do without her.

And that's why he was walking back into the flat, ready to face the music.

Donna and Greg were sitting on the sofa watching tv, baby Jason was in the carrycot on the other sofa, fast asleep. They turned and looked at him as he walked in silently.

"Harry man," said Greg in relief, "we were about to send out the search party."

"Where did you go?" asked Donna, frowning.

"Just a walk," he shrugged and they shared a significant look, "is Kitty ok?"

"She's up but she hasn't come out of the bedroom all day," Donna told him, "she's been waiting for you to get back."

Maybe now she knew how he felt, sitting up waiting, wondering...

“Right...thanks guys,” he said heavily, dropping the keys on the table and walking over to the bedroom.

The door was shut and he didn't open it for a long moment, instead he stood staring at it, wondering what he would be feeling in ten minutes time - would everything be ok, or was this it? Eventually he pushed it open, walking into the room. The curtains hadn't been drawn and in the dim light he could see Kitty sitting on the edge of the bed, staring at her clasped hands.

Harry didn't think he could speak just at that moment, so instead he pulled his coat off and dropped it on the sofa in front of Kitty before sinking down into it himself. He sat watching her for sometime in silence, but she didn't seem to want to look at him and he didn't want to be the first to talk.

Finally she spoke.

“I thought you'd gone for good,” she said awkwardly, twisting her fingers in anxiety.

He didn't really know what to say to that so he just shrugged in a way that plainly said ‘I'm here aren't I?’

“Harry-” she began, before trailing off and giving him an unsteady look, “I don't really know what to say...”

“Me neither,” he replied.

“But I'm - I'm so sorry,” she said in a rush, “I was just...I just went way too far.”

“What do you want me to say? That it's fine?” he asked her, feeling the familiar anger building up.

“No, of course not...” she said desperately, “no...but, I don't know what to say, how to explain...I've never had to before...”

“Well maybe that’s your problem,” he snapped at her, finding his promise to keep his temper quickly breaking, “you’re so used to doing things your own way you just don’t care about anyone else, do you?”

“I - I do,” she tried, looking at him with a slightly shocked expression, “I do care...what you think...”

“Yeah obviously,” he said sarcastically, jumping to his feet because he couldn’t just sit still anymore.

“Harry,” she said desperately, jumping to her feet too, “I’m sorry, I promise I won’t do it again, I promise!”

“Don’t promise me things you can’t keep,” he told her furiously.

“I can!” she said quickly.

“Donna told me about your little ‘phases’ Kitty!” he shouted and she reeled back slightly.

“Don’t listen to anything she says,” she hissed suddenly, features darkening, “you know what she’s like, I know she’s been talking to you about me, planting ideas in your mind!”

“Maybe she’s right?” he told her, secretly surprised she’d known about the Donna situation and had never said anything to him about it.

“No! Harry, please don’t listen to her, she’s got it in for me, surely you can see that?” she said in despair, “Too much bad blood!”

“Fine, whatever, don’t tell me what this whole secret thing is between you and Donna, do you know what? I don’t care! I was feeling pretty shit before she even started talking to me today, ok?”

Kitty’s mouth snapped closed and she watched Harry for a few seconds, obviously unsure of what to do or say next.

“Do you know how worried I was last night? When you didn’t come home? And I couldn’t get in touch with you? After what happened to your brother? And Riddle after me! Do you even know what I thought had happened?”

“What’s my brother got to do with this-” she began, pale faced and confused.

“Nothing!” he yelled, “But we’re not safe! You’re not safe! And while you’re out with your scummy friends getting drunk I’m sitting here thinking you’ve been murdered or...or...worse!”

“Harry,” Kitty said in a shocked voice, too taken aback to answer, “nobodies trying to kill me, you’re just being paranoid-”

“I’m not being paranoid!” he practically bellowed and she flinched back slightly, “Are you even listening to what I’m saying to you? I thought you were dead! Right? Understand! Get it now?”

“I get it,” she said in a small voice.

He breathed deeply, trying to calm himself down, suddenly aware that Donna and Greg could probably hear every word they were saying in the next room. He looked over to Kitty, whose pale face and black ringed eyes made her look more ill than he’d ever seen her and seemed to highlight his anger and anxiety even more.

“I’m sorry I made you think that, feel that,” she said awkwardly.

He raised a hand he hadn’t realised had been shaking to his eyes and pinched the bridge of his nose wearily.

“I didn’t realise that’s what you thought...I thought you were just angry at me for getting so out of control...”

“Oh, I’m pretty angry about that too,” he told her fiercely.

“I know,” she said in a pained voice, “I don’t know why I did it Harry.”

“Donna said you do it all the time.”

“I don’t-”

“Don’t lie to me!”

She reeled back once more in shock before giving a determined expression and meeting his eyes.

“Fine. I do. But not as much as she’ll make you think...I’m not good at saying no, the whole willpower thing...”

“Get good at it,” he told her seriously, “stop doing it.”

“Harry-”

“I’m serious! Stop drinking if you can’t take it! I don’t want to go through another night like that ever again!”

“Ok,” she said in a small voice once more.

“Do you promise me?” he said fiercely.

“I promise,” she whispered, “I’m sorry.”

“Ok...right...” he said, taking a shaky breath, “then...that’s sorted.”

“You forgive me?” she said hopefully.

“I will,” he told her.

“Thank you!” she said forcefully, “I won’t let you down, I promise!”

“Ok...good...”

They lapsed into silence, unsure of what to do or say now. Kitty wrapped her arms around her stomach, looking so unsure of herself

and anxious that Harry felt like he was seeing a whole new person. She glanced at him warily, before dropping her arms to her side and moving towards him.

She attempted to straighten his shirt for a moment, not meeting his eyes for a long time.

“I hate the thought that you’re disappointed in me,” she told him eventually, “more than anything. I wouldn’t have done it purposefully.”

“I know,” he admitted.

Kitty nodded heavily, biting her lip before looking up into his eyes. He could see in her eyes that she was telling the truth, that she was ashamed and angry with herself, that she was sorry, and in some way that made him feel better. She leant forward slowly to kiss him, but it wasn’t like usual, it was somehow muted and he didn’t know who’s fault this was, his or hers.

When they broke apart Harry could tell that she’d noticed this because she looked away, cheeks flushing slightly. He gave a sigh, as angry as he had been with her, he’d seen Kitty drunk enough times to know she really didn’t have any control over what she did when she was like that. And his reaction last night when he thought she’d gone was enough to tell him that he still wanted be here, despite everything.

“How are you feeling?” he asked her finally, tilting her face so he could see it in the light properly.

There was dark smudges beneath each eye and her skin had a slightly waxen, yellowy tinge.

“About as good as I deserve probably,” she told him, “where did you go today?”

“A walk,” he told her, brushing some of her braids behind her ear thoughtfully.

She stared at him for a moment, before her face crumpled with pain suddenly.

“I hate this...I feel so horrible...so guilty!” she burst out, angry at herself, “how can you stand me!”

“I dunno,” he teased half-heartedly, “why do I put up with you, eh?”

She gave a flicker of a smile.

“I wouldn’t if I were you,” she told him seriously, “you’re too good for me.”

“Stop being stupid,” he cautioned her, “everyone makes mistakes. Just make sure your next one is less terrifying for me.”

“Ok,” she said in a small voice, “Sorry.”

Harry didn’t reply, leaning forwards instead and kissing her properly this time, safe in the knowledge that Kitty had made him a promise that she wasn’t going to break, that she’d know next time to get in touch with him. She seemed to be so happy that he was finally speaking to her almost normally, and that she’d been given a second chance that she totally lost herself in the kiss, wrapping her arms around Harry desperately. He grinned into the kiss as she pressed herself against him, happy that ten minutes later from standing outside the door debating about coming in, everything was ok.

Without really realising it, they were moving backwards and with a sudden lurch Kitty fell backwards onto the bed, giggling as she pulled Harry down on top of her. He looked down at her for a moment, grinning at her, impossibly relieved everything worked out before she leant up and kissed him.

“I should fall out with you more often,” he said breathlessly the next time they pulled apart.

Kitty giggled slightly, yellowy skin now looking healthier with her flushed cheeks.



“Please don’t, I wouldn’t be able to stand it,” she laughed, “but I’ll do this for you any time you want.”

“Oh really?” he asked her, eyebrow raised, “Kisses on demand?”

“Kisses by Kitty,” she nodded, grinning widely as he pretended to think about this.

“Sounds good to me,” he told her, leaning down and kissing her again.

When they finally broke apart a few minutes later, breathing heavily, Harry didn’t pull away but merely stayed with his face inches from hers.

“With this whole Donna thing,” he began, noticing her eyes clouding over once again, “I’ve been thinking - we really need to get out of here.”

“I know, you’re right,” she told him, wrapping her arms around his back and pulling him down so he was lying on her properly, “I’m picking up my wages in a few days and then we can get out of here - somewhere new, where nobody knows us.”

“A clean break,” he agreed, toying with her braids again, “so, a few days?”

“Three at the most,” she said, giving a wide grin as she slipped her hands underneath his shirt and ran them up his back.

Harry laughed and leant down and kissed her happily for a long moment, before breaking away and murmuring into her lips.

“We should definitely argue more.”

She gave a low laugh, the vibrations of which Harry could feel through his own chest. As he kissed her, he marvelled at how differently he could feel within such a short space of time, and how

glad he was not to let something so stupid ruin what they had. And as he slipped his own hands underneath her shirt he couldn't help but look forward to the future, one with Donna in their lives, without this flat and this city...

A bright future.

"Tonks?"

She was aware, in a disjointed way, that someone was talking to her but it sounded so far away that she gave it no notice.

"Tonks?"

There is was again. She frowned deeply and gave a mumbled response. The voice repeated again and groggily she re-entered consciousness. Bright light flooded into her eyes and she scrunched them up instantly.

"Eugh...wha time s'it?" she mumbled, stretching out.

"Its half eight in the morning," explained the voice, "wasn't sure if you had work?"

She continued to stretch and finally managed to drag her eyes open. They instantly fell on a pair she knew all too well and she instantly became a little more awake, unwilling to show him how bad she looked in the morning.

"Remus, oh," she said, sitting up and running a hand through her hair as she looked around, "I must have..."

Here she paused to give a great yawn and he smiled at her thoughtfully, "Must have fallen asleep reading. Sorry..."

"Why are you apologising?" he asked easily, "I was just wondering if you had to go in to the Ministry?"

"No..."

“Oh, well I let you sleep then,” he said hastily, “sorry to have woken you up.”

“Don’t be silly, I appreciate the thought,” she said, swinging her legs of the coach and rubbing her face quickly, “stay a bit and help me wake up, I’ve got loads to do today.”

“Ok,” he said, looking slightly surprised and settling into the sofa opposite her, “so...what’s the latest on Azkaban, I can’t make any sense out of the Prophet?”

“Well, it was a breakout, but the alarm was raised quickly this time. Half my cell blocks empty though,” she stated.

“They were from you’re block?” he asked in surprise, sitting down on the table in front of her.

“Yep, Malfoy, Grimbit and my old friend Saracen, you know, the one I was telling you about?” she said wearily, “And Malfoy of all people! He’s got the luck of the devil that guy!”

“Do they know how they did it?” asked Remus, frowning deeply.

“Not yet,” she sighed heavily, “and the guy who was on shifts not going to be any help.”

“Why not?”

“Because he’s dead,” she said flatly, “killing curse. Must have taken him unawares because he didn’t even draw his wand...Aren’t I glad I wasn’t on shift?”

She gave a dull laugh and slumped back into her seat.

“You’re lucky Tonks, it could just have easily been you,” he said seriously, looking pale in the early morning light.

She didn't say anything, staring ahead glumly. Remus watched her thoughtfully for a second.

"So what happens now? At the prison I mean?" he asked, "first the Dementors leaving and now this..."

"I don't know," she shrugged, "the Ministry are meeting today to discuss it. But at the moment it's business as usual, I'm on shift this afternoon I guess, I'm on the adjacent block for now."

"You're going back?" he asked, looking shocked.

"Yes," she said, a little too defiantly, because she soon gave a quick smile, "got to earn my crust somehow! Anyhow, we've had a few guards walk out because of this. The last thing we need now is an understaffed prison!"

"Yes, but," he began, looking unnerved, "they're leaving for good reason, the place obviously isn't safe anymore..."

"Come on Remus," she joked, "I'm a big girl, I can look after myself."

"I'm sure that's what the guard that was killed thought too," he pointed out, frowning deeply.

She stared at him for a moment and he caught a flash of something in her eyes - was it anger?

"Well, someone's got to stay there - if we lose many more guards the whole place will be empty by next week and the Ministry will be taking emergency steps."

"Which are?" he asked her.

"Well, if the prison can't be used anymore they can reinstate the death penalty," she said, hard edge to her voice, "and you know what that means..."

“The veil,” he said quietly.

“That can’t happen,” she told him fiercely, “but Dumbledore won’t let that happen. He’s coming over later, I’m going to ask his advice, see what I can do...”

They both lapsed into silence, deep in thought. Tonks gave a great yawn and slumped backwards in her seat.

“Why are you’re sleeping here Tonks?” asked Remus suddenly, as if he’d remembered something that had been bothering him for sometime.

“I was at the Ministry until three this morning,” she sighed, “everyone’s going mad down there...didn’t fancy going back to Geri’s to be kept awake by a screaming baby...”

Remus nodded understandingly.

“I really don’t mind children,” she added hastily, “its just right at this moment I’d like to have at least one night’s uninterrupted sleep.”

“Are you not sleeping well at the moment?” he asked her, looking instantly worried.

She was fully intended to lie, as she always did, so she was as surprised as he was by her answer.

“Sleep at all would be good right now,” she’d replied flatly.

“Really, why?” he asked, edging forward and fixing her with an anxious look.

“Because,” she began, before realising she couldn’t even answer that and shrugged, “I don’t even know...”

He watched her silence for a moment and to avoid looking at him she began to rub her face again – her eyes looked itchy and were refusing to stay open for more than a few moments.

“Maybe you’re overtired?” he suggested, “you work such long hours and get so little sleep you’re body clocks all messed up?”

“Messed up’s the word,” she agreed, before giving him a small smile, “nothing a long sleep wouldn’t fix – or a cup of coffee.”

“Well that I can help you with,” he said, clapping his hands onto his knees, “one cup of strong black coffee coming up.”

“That’d be magic,” she agreed with a grin as he walked out.

Giving a wide smile, she settled her head against the arm rest again, pulling her legs back up onto the sofa. The floor was freezing cold and she was wearing her tattyest pair of old socks, the purple and orange striped ones with enough holes to be classed as fishnets. She closed her eyes wearily, losing herself in a daydream whereby Remus brought her cups of coffee every morning without asking.

She didn’t even realise that she’d fallen asleep again until she heard on the edge of consciousness the sound of Remus coming back in, before quietly trying to put the cup on the table.

“I’m awake,” she said instantly, rising from sleep like a monster from the deep.

“No, you get some sleep,” he whispered soothingly.

“No, I’m awake,” she told him defiantly, “just need coffee.”

“Here you are then,” he said, handing it over to her, taking an extra long amount of time to make sure she was actually sitting up and able to hold it without dropping it.

“So,” began Tonks, before taking a deep drink of the scalding liquid, “I haven’t even asked about you Remus, what’s the bacon?”

“I’ve been working on finding a spell to locate Harry and Cathy - I must have read a million books by now but none of them seem to work...I think he must have paid a lot of gold for that kind of protection,” he said with a sigh, leaning back into his own chair and hugging the coffee to him.

“He must have been desperate...” she suggested, sitting up a little.

“Must have been,” he agreed heavily, shaking his head, “I just wish we’d known sooner...I should have recognised that-”

“It’s not your fault Remus,” she said flatly, “we were all trying to cope ourselves when this happened...I think maybe that’s what Harry should have been recognising, that Sirius going affected us all...”

Remus nodded deeply but didn’t reply and she sipped her drink a little more slowly now, studying him intently. She had gulped so much down she’d burnt her tongue and was desperately trying to pull herself together; she wasn’t the best morning person.

“Do you know what?” he began in a distant voice.

“What?”

“I really wish you wouldn’t go back to Azkaban,” he said seriously, before looking over to her.

Tonks was slightly taken aback by this statement.

“I - I know it’s not the best job in the world,” she said, finding herself unable to look at him now, “and most of the time I wish the same thing...But someone has to do it I guess...”

“But why you?” he asked.

She shrugged, she couldn’t tell him that it was purely for the money, that she was drowning in a sea of debt that she could see no way out of...

“Don’t worry Remus,” she said, unable to really think of anything comforting to say, “it’s not really anymore dangerous that being an Auror. And you know me, I’m always careful.”

“Oh yeah?” he asked, eyebrow raised, “how’s your shoulder healing?”

“Apart from that,” she laughed, “dead safe me.”

“You’re the clumsiest person I know,” he pointed out.

“Ah, to the untrained eye yes,” she joked, “but underneath this chaotic exterior is a cool, calm, collected and ultimately refined soul.”

He gave a wide grin and she felt her heart actually skip a beat at that and her stomach practically plummeted into her shoes. The combined result was that she completely missed her mouth with the cup and spilled hot coffee all down her. With several curses she jumped up, shaking her top and placing her cup on the table, completely missing the edge as it fell to the floor and smashed. She gave a jump at the sudden noise and tripped over backwards, sprawling back onto the sofa and managing to catch the side of the coffee table and kick it over.

She sat still in shock for a moment before she became aware of another noise in the room – the sound of someone trying to suppress laughter. She looked over to Remus in shock just in time to see him turn red and give in and begin to laugh right out loud.

“It’s not funny!” she exclaimed indignantly, “I could be seriously injured!”

“I’m – s-sorry!” he tried to say, before shaking his head and giving into the laughter, “A-are you?”

“Probably - Don’t laugh!” she cried, smile tugging at her own lips.

He made an expression that said he had no choice in the matter and before long she was joining in with him.



“Stop making fun of me!” she told him when she’d slightly calmed down.

“I’m sorry Tonks,” he said, wiping a happy tear away from his eye, “it’s just so easy!”

“You!” she growled, pulling the pillow out from behind her and threw it at him with well aimed precision.

He looked slightly startled for a moment, before giving a slightly wicked grin, picking the pillow up and winging back to her. Defiantly, and with a slight giggle, she threw it back at him. He picked it up again and weighed it in his hands, challenging look on his face.

“You wouldn’t want to engage in war with me,” she told him seriously as picked up another from her sofa.

“I’m not such as easy target either you know,” he told her, light of mischief in his eyes.

“Just so you know. I wouldn’t want to hurt you,” she said.

“Nor I you,” he replied sweetly.

“Fine!”

And with that she lurched forward and smacked him across the head with her pillow, instantly he retaliated with a swift under arm thrust to the stomach. A few more blows were traded before he also jumped out of his seat and clambered backwards over the coffee table and swung a heavy over arm at her head.

“That all you got?” she shrieked, getting quite a successful shot in that sent him staggering slightly sideways.

Using the momentum she hit him a few times in succession, causing him to burst out laughing again as he went tripping backwards. He

aimed a shot at her head in retaliation, but as soon as it hit she gave a yelp and clasped her face in her hands, back turned to him.

“Oh, I’m sorry Tonks,” he said, instantly dropping the pillow and walking over to her silent form, “are you ok-”

“Sucker!” she yelled happily, turning round quickly and surprising him, “lost your weapon!”

“You sneaky-” he said, looking happily shocked, before attempting to wrestle her pillow away.

“Ah no, that’s mine!” she laughed, trying to tug it away from him.

And thus ensued a bizarre game of tug-of-war that saw them careering around the room, laughing like school kids and they shouted insults to each other and fought for supremacy. Tonks tried many tactics, including pretending to be hurt again, which didn’t work the second time, she tried pleading, complimenting, insulting, and finally settled on pulling him around in circles, hoping to make him dizzy and throw up.

However, she forgot that running him circles also included running herself in circles and in her laughter and dizziness completely failed to see the sofa, which she banged into and went toppling into, shortly followed by Remus. They lay in an ungainly heap, bursting into loud, hysterical laughter, completely unable to move for some time.

Eventually, when the ability to look at each other without laughing returned to them, a small part of Tonks mind told her that she was lying on the sofa with Remus on top of her.

“I think I’m being crushed,” she giggled and he gave a laugh.

“What a way to go,” he joked, “I could see that on your tombstone.”

“Killed by immaturity,” she agreed, before giving another laugh and shoving him in the chest, “and asphyxiation still.”

Still laughing, he climbed to his feet and some part of her was amazed that firstly she hadn't gone into meltdown with the close proximity of him and secondly, that he was acting so lighthearted and carefree. No offence to him, but Remus wasn't the type for spontaneous pillow fights. Shaking her head, she took the hand he offered to pull her to her feet and she found it hard to ground her thoughts for a moment.

"Fancy some breakfast?" he asked, picking up the pillows off the floor.

"Tell you what," she said imperiously as she brushed herself down, "since you've been such a naughty boy, I'll make it and you'll have to suffer the might of my cooking."

"Can you cook then?" he asked her in mock-amazement as they headed for the door.

"Nope," she smiled sweetly, "I've already told you I can't do any of this housey stuff. But, and here's my secret, I can cook only one thing, and I can cook it good."

"What is it?" he asked, wide smile on his face now.

"You'll just have to wait and see, won't you?" she told him, leading the way into the kitchen.

"Sounds ominous," he said in a stage-whisper, to which she turned around and smacked him on the arm.

Ten minutes later found Tonks and Remus occupying the empty kitchen which wouldn't see any Order activity for at least another hour or two. She was sat cross-legged on the kitchen counter, large bowl between her legs in which she was mixing something with an ancient wooden spoon. Remus was leant against the counter with an easy smile on his face as she chatted away, every now and again peeking into the bowl.

“It’s some sort of batter isn’t it?” he asked her, attempting to dip his finger into it.

“Oil!” she exclaimed, smacking the back of his wrist with the spoon and giving him a reprimanding look, “don’t even think of it buddy – now grate me some cheese.”

“Yes master,” he said, fetching the cheese and laying it on a plate.

He was just about to mutter the right incantation when the spoon came out of nowhere again and hit his wand hand.

“No magic,” she cautioned, grin on her face at the power the wooden spoon commanded, “this is a muggle recipe – so that means elbow grease.”

“Fine, fine...no need to get physical,” he said vaguely, before wondering aloud, “And why does that phrase always sound so disgusting? Elbow grease?”

“Dunno,” she said thoughtfully, looking over to him as if she’d never wondered but that now she had she was intrigued, “why not anything else – like wrist fat? Or shoulder oil?”

She gave a snigger and tipped a little more flour into the bowl. She misjudged the way she was holding the bag and far more fell in than intended, causing a small cloud of flour dust to rise up around her and coat her face. She looked up to him with a sour expression on her face as he began to laugh again.

“Only you Tonks,” he said, shaking his head and beginning to grate the cheese.

“I know,” she sighed melodramatically, “all my life I’ve been the clumsy one – one day I’ll be able to go a whole day without tripping, spilling, breaking or crushing, I swear it.”

“Ah you don’t mind it really,” he said as he concentrated on the cheese, “it’s part of your personality – you like being different.”

“Oh do I?” she challenged light-heartedly, but secretly slightly taken aback.

“Of course you do,” he told her, giving her a strange look that said he was just as much surprised at his observation as she was.

“Well, we’re a bit different then aren’t we?” she noted casually.

“Why’s that?”

“Well, you seem to spend your whole life trying to convince everyone that you’re exactly the same as them,” she said, paying particular attention to her batter now.

He was silent at this and she looked over to him worriedly. He was staring at her with a look of utmost surprise on his face.

“Why’d you say that?” he asked her, wandering over with the grated cheese and leaning against the counter again.

“Because that’s what I’ve noticed,” she said, wondering if she was being too obvious, “you don’t like being the centre of attention, you’re always there in the background. You seem to be just waiting for everyone to realise they don’t like you or something.”

“Yeah well, I never was very good at being centre stage,” he said, slightly awkwardly.

He sounded like he wanted to end the conversation, but when she looked closer she realised it was almost the complete opposite, he was watching her with intense curiosity as if wanting to talk to her more but not knowing how to start.

“I was always exactly the opposite,” she said, beginning to mix again, “I figured, here I am surrounded by all these people, but I’m so different from them, you know? It’s the worst thing to be, when you’re growing up, being different.”

“Did you grow up with muggles then?” he asked her curiously.

“No, with magic folk,” she explained, “but even in the wizarding world you can be weird right?”

“Oh yeah,” he agreed with a dry laugh.

“And being a Meta-kid meant the embarrassment of having a face that couldn’t decide where to stick,” she said giving a laugh not unlike his own, “so I figured I’ve either got to hide away from everyone and try not to be noticed as much as possible, or I exploit my strangeness and make it my party piece...”

“And you chose the latter?” he nodded, as if fully understanding now.

“And you chose the shadows,” she nodded, looking across to him and thinking about how it must have been growing up with something as feared as lycanthropy.

“It always seemed easier,” he told her, “and eventually you sort of get stuck like that and you forget how to be any different. I don’t think I could be outgoing if I tried.”

“What about pillow fighting today?” she said, with a small smile, “the Remus everyone else knows wouldn’t do that.”

“Yeah, I guess so...” he said, giving it some thought before looking up to her again curiously, “do you think I took the wrong path?”

“Well, mine wasn’t perfect either. You get stuck just the same, labelled the girl that has all the fun, all the laughs, can’t be serious...” she said with a sad shrug, “and then you forget how to be quiet and sit in the shadows.”

He gave a brief flicker of a smile, as if realising they were exact opposites.

“So then you have to choose between someone who everyone thinks is too straight-laced to have fun, or someone who’s too much of an airhead to do anything serious,” she said heavily.

“You can do serious Tonks,” he told her, “you can’t get your NEWTS, do three years at the Academy, work 8 hour shifts at Azkaban and psychiatrically analyse werewolves and not be.”

“Don’t talk about yourself like that,” she said with a slight frown whilst blushing slightly at his praise.

He gave a shrug

“I tell you what,” he offered suddenly, fixing her with his intense eyes that made her legs feel slightly like jelly, “if you show me how to relax and have fun, I’ll show you how to make everyone take you more seriously. Do we have a deal?”

She gave a disbelieving laugh.

“I think you may have,” she said, shaking her head, “whose is first lesson?”

“Well, tell me what you’re making first,” he said.

“Cheese and treacle pancakes,” she said with a mischievous smile.

“Then this is definitely your territory,” he laughed, “fun with pancakes.”

“And there is much fun to be had with pancakes!” she exclaimed, sliding off the counter with the bowl and marching him over to the stove, “but first...we’ve got to do this right.”

With a flick of her wand Remus was decked out in white and black checker-board trousers, a white smock and a tall chef’s hat. He looked down at himself and burst out laughing as she produced the same outfit on herself.

“Now, it’s common knowledge that all chefs are either, French, Swedish or Italian yes?” she asked him.

“Is it?” he asked, before she gave him a sharp expression and he nodded quickly, “that’s right, they are.”

“Well, in that case you shall be French and I shall be Italian. We can both improvise with a couple of ‘hurdy gurdies’ so Sweden doesn’t feel left out.”

“Hurdy gurdies?” he repeated faintly.

“That’s what all Swedish chefs say,” she said despairingly, then put on a deep, jovial voice and said, “Hurdy Gurdy. There, now, as a Frenchman you require an über-thin, slightly disturbing moustache.”

“I do?” he laughed as she brandished her wand and quickly he sprouted the aforesaid moustache.

“Now you have to twirl it round your finger a lot and say ‘oh la la!’ go on!”

“Oh la la,” he said in a comical French accent.

“Good, but with my help, it could be the best,” she said in mock-seriousness, “you can also practise by saying ‘Le singe est sur la branche!’”

“And what does that mean?” he laughed.

“It means ‘the monkey is on the branch’,” she said in all seriousness.

“Why do I need to say that!” he exclaimed.

“Because, not only is it comical due to the fact that there are both no monkey’s here and no branches for the aforesaid monkey’s to be on,” she pointed out, “but it just sounds so damn cool to suddenly point to a corner of the room and exclaim loudly, le singe est sur le branche!”



“Le singe est sur le branche!” tried Remus, before twirling his moustache and wagging his eyebrows.

Tonks tried to seriously assess the whole image but found it far too comical and began to laugh hysterically, “P-perfect!”

“Now you, I’m not being strange on my own,” he said and she nodded happily.

“Gladly, now as you’re sidekick and partner in crime, I require a bottlebrush black moustache with matching eyebrow accessories,” she told him, concentrating and suddenly sprouting them, “and the chronic need to occasionally shout ‘Mama mia’ and ‘Ciao’ very loudly – preferably whilst driving an imaginary scooter.”

“Imaginary scooter?” he spluttered, unable to control himself now.

“Sure, like this...”

She began to make fake engine noises and she trundled around the kitchen, apparently astride a scooter. She pulled up in front of him and coolly said ‘Ciao’ in a heavy Italian accent before driving on. She wandered back over to him and said, “Mama mia?”

“Le singe est sur le branche!” he replied.

“Excellent,” she nodded happily, “now we can cook.”

Bill was looking through the sheaf of parchment he held in hand, deep in concentration. What he really needed now was Remus’ expert knowledge in such areas, he was hopelessly lost. He caught sight of another one which immediately begged attention and pushed the door to the kitchen open absent-mindedly.

“Ah-ha! Le singe est sur le branche!”

Bill jumped at the sudden yell that erupted from within the room and practically dropped everything he was carrying when he saw who had

said it. Remus was standing in the middle of the kitchen, frying pan in hand and wearing the most bizarre set of clothes he'd ever seen on a person. Bill stared at him for a long moment before his attention was caught by another similarly clad figure.

Tonks was trundling towards him, making fake engine noises and wagging her overly large eyebrows. She paused next to him, said 'Ciao', before heading off towards the table.

Bill, who actually thought he was going insane, turned around, walked out of the kitchen and shut the door. He took a few steadying breaths before opening the door and walking back in. Sure enough there were the two, standing frying-pans in hand waiting for his return.

"Bonjour monsieur!" exclaimed Tonks, before waving the frying pan at him, "Pancake?"

"Isn't it crepe?" asked Remus thoughtfully.

"Indeed you're right! Crepe, Bill?"

He tried to think of something in reply that would adequately explain what he was thinking right at that moment.

"What the bloody hell are you two doing?" was what he settled on.

Tonks began to laugh and Remus chuckled too, looking slightly embarrassed.

"We're making pancakes," explained Tonks, gesturing with the pan again, "want one?"

"Why are you dressed up like...like..." he began, vaguely pointing to their outfits, "like that?"

"What, don't you like my new clothes?" she asked petulantly, bottom lip stuck out petulantly.

He just shook his head and turned to Remus

“How did you let her con you into this?” Bill asked him despairingly, eyes rolling as he headed over to the table and looked at the mountain of pancakes they’d already created.

“Actually, it was Remus’ idea,” said Tonks in an airy voice, heading back over to the oven.

“Yeah right,” he laughed, before looking over to Remus, “nice moustache.”

“Thanks,” laughed Remus, pulling his tall hat off, “that was Tonks’ idea.”

“You two are in high spirits today,” he observed, sitting on the table and studying the two, “do we have good news.”

“Not unless you count the fact I have the morning off?” Tonks asked him over her shoulder.

He laughed and pulled the parchments onto his lap, maybe now wasn’t the best time to ask Remus for help, he was obviously side-tracked with other things.

“You’re obviously not worried about Azkaban then,” he said.

Tonks gave a shrug, “Can’t be miserable old farts all the time can we? If I got upset every time something bad happened around here I’d be more depressed than Moaning Myrtle!”

Bill just shook his head whilst Remus tried not to laugh.

“Ok!” shouted Tonks suddenly, “here I go again!”

“Oh, you’ve got to watch this,” Remus told him, nodding towards Tonks who had shuffled into the middle of the room and was holding the pan like it was a cauldron about to explode.

“And for my next trick...” she said in a show-business voice.

She jerked the pan upwards with two hands and the pancake soared out and upwards, spinning quickly.

And didn't come back down.

Next to him Remus began to silently laugh as Tonks placed her hands on her hips and stared at the ceiling with a curious expression on her face. Bill couldn't help but join in with the laughter as he and Remus wandered over to stand next to her, both looking up at the ceiling.

There were five pancakes stuck to it.

“Mum's going to kill you when she sees this little sis,” stated Bill.

“Forget your mum, my stomach's going to kill me – I'd just like one pancake to work!” she said, still staring at the assorted baked products stuck to the ceiling.

Just then, one of them began to peel away, tumbling through the air until it landed smack bang on Remus' upturned face.

It took only a millisecond for them to begin laughing at his shocked expression.

Kitty was feeling incredibly guilty. She had been inches away from losing Harry because of a stupid, stupid mistake, had caused him to get really angry with her, for the first time since they'd met, and now he was back to worrying about her. She still felt ill from the night before and once again they had the flat to themselves. She got the feeling Donna was avoiding them (or, she thought sensibly, her in particular) after what happened yesterday and she knew that before long her friend would have something to say about it.

“Fancy something to eat?”

Harry was in the kitchen rooting around as she lay stretched out on the sofa, deep in thought.

“Yeah, if you want,” she called back, unable to quite believe that he’d gone from being furious at her to offering to cook.

It was all very suspicious, he couldn’t be that nice.

“What do you fancy?” he asked, wandering into the lounge.

She thought for a moment, still finding something wrong with the picture, as it were. Surely she should be trying to make it up to him?

“I tell you what, I should be the one cooking,” she said, dragging herself off the sofa, “what do you want?”

“No offence Kitty, but I want to eat something that hasn’t been cremated or caramelised,” he laughed.

“Ok, fair call, I’m crap at cooking,” she admitted, before looking up brightly, “how about take away, my shout?”

“Your treat eh?” he asked, sounding intrigued as she wandered over to him and wrapped her arms around his neck.

“Yeah, what do you fancy, Chinese?” she asked.

“Sounds great.”

“Excellent,” she said, leaning towards him and giving him a quick, grateful kiss, “I’m off down the shops then - give me, twenty minutes?”

“You don’t want me to come with you?” he asked in surprise as she fetched her coat and bag.

“No point in us both going, I fancy the fresh air anyway,” she called as she opened the door, “see you in a bit!”

She closed the door and locked it, wandering down the corridor deep in thought. She couldn't help but thinking of the disappointed look on Harry's face when they'd argued earlier, when he'd been left to dwell on his thoughts all day on his own. She couldn't quite believe he'd walked out like that either - he had been so angry at her and he'd got completely the wrong end of the stick.

She was almost glad he'd jumped to the wrong conclusion though, trying not to imagine how he'd have acted if he'd known the truth. She was just pondering this further when the sudden trill of a phone ringing jerked her out of her reverie and she pulled her mobile out of her pocket.

She didn't recognise the number and for a horrible moment she thought it was that strange woman again for Harry...

"Hey?" she answered, waiting with baited breath.

"Crazy chick," came the smooth, recognisable voice of Dijon, "how's you're head?"

"Fine thanks Mr. Mustard," she said, slightly relieved, "how did you get this number?"

"You gave it me yesterday," he said and she could almost hear his grin.

"And?" she prompted, as she ran across the road towards the take away, "What do you want?"

"Fancy meeting up tonight?" he asked, obviously cutting to the chase, "I've got a mate here who'd love for you to help him out."

"I'm busy tonight," she stated firmly.

"Aw come on, I'll get the tequila in if you bring your own gorgeous self?" Dijon offered.

“Do you want another bin lid to the head or something?” she said angrily, “what did I say about you talking to me like that?”

“Sorry babes,” he apologised easily.

“Dijon! You’re still doing it, now fuck off!”

“No way to talk to your mates crazy chick,” he told her sternly, before giving a booming laugh, “now shall I tell my mate to meet us in a half hour?”

“Are you deaf as well as thick?” she demanded, reaching the take-away now and hanging outside it until she finished this conversation, “I said I’m busy, ok?”

“I thought you needed helping out?” he asked petulantly, “Last night you said you needed us just as much as we needed you!”

“That’s true,” she said through gritted teeth, “but I can’t tonight, I’m busy.”

“This is a serious spanner in my party works crazy chick, I hope you know this,” Dijon told her.

“So sue me,” she snapped, close to becoming seriously angry with him now.

He gave a melodramatic sigh.

“So you don’t want my help?” he asked finally, sounding slightly hurt.

“Of course I do,” she told him, “I just can’t take it tonight, ok?”

“How about tomorrow?” he asked hopefully.

“I’m at work.”

“You said you we’re quitting anyway,” he told her, “get your wages and do a runner - I’ll introduce you to my mate.”

Kitty hesitated, as much as she didn’t like the way Dijon was getting the upper hand, he was right, she really needed this. And tomorrow would be the last time, after that it was her new start on life. Her and Harry needed this, you’re doing this for Harry she told her firmly.

“Ok Dijon, you’re on. Meet you at 1 at the sundial in town?” she said.

He gave a happy whoop, “Right you are crazy chick! Party time!”

“No partying this time,” she told him fiercely, “this is just business. I want you to make sure this mate of yours is willing and able, get it?”

“Aw, not even a few drinks?”

“No. I’m busy,” she said.

“Come on-”

“Bye Dijon,” she said, hanging up on his mid-sentence.

As much as she thought the guy was a bit of a loser, she couldn’t deny that he’d really helped him out, and tomorrow, tomorrow was the end.

“So you and Remus seem to be getting on well these days,” said Bill, helping Tonks with the drying up.

“We always got on well Bill,” she brushed off and he gave a secret smile.

“Better than usual then,” he added.

“ Not particularly,” she said, placing the plate on top of the mountainous pile, “who knew a few pancakes could make so much washing up?”



“Can’t fool me little sis,” he said, nudging her slightly, “what’s the story?”

“There is no story,” she told him with a shrug and she shook her tea towel slightly.

“Really?” he said airily, “you just happen to be here early in the morning for what other reason than pancakes?”

“I fell asleep in the lounge,” she said, laughing at him as he was being rather silly, “and why not pancakes? They’re as good as any other breakfast product.”

“A likely story,” he said conspiratorially, “you’re forgetting I know you too well.”

“Not well enough obviously,” she grinned, before turning an honest, innocent face towards him, “you’re being ridiculous.”

“Why am I?” he teased.

“Because he’s far too old for me for a start,” she told him importantly, “and his Swedish accent is terrible...”

“And...?” he prompted, enjoying himself immensely.

“And he probably has a secret girlfriend or wife hidden away that none of us have heard about,” she whispered to him in mock-seriousness, “don’t you think he just looks the type for bigamy?”

“Joke all you want then Tonks,” he said, shaking his head at her theatrics, “but I’m just telling you what I see.”

“Then you need your sight checked don’t you?” she asked him simply, “I can’t believe you’d even think that.”

“Charlie thinks the same too,” he added, playing his trump card.

“And you expect me to take you seriously now?” she laughed, “Charlie needs to spend his time more productively.”

“I take it things aren’t really mending very well in that department?” he asked her, picking up the stacks of plates and following her to the dresser.

“It’s hard you know Bill,” she shrugged, welcoming this opportunity to talk about something other than Remus, “things were a bit rough between us towards the end weren’t they?”

“Yeah, he told me. But you know, I think you two should at least try and be friends, it seems a shame after how close you were that things should be so spoiled,” he told her seriously, “Charlie would really appreciate it.”

“Well maybe if he gave me a bit of space,” she told him as she sorted out the knives and forks into two separate piles, “he’s been in my face all year, especially the past month.”

“Isn’t it obvious why?” he asked her.

“He wants to get back together?” she suggested, rolling her eyes.

“Well probably that too,” conceded Bill, “but I think he’s just jealous.”

“Of what?” she demanded, slightly angry.

“Remus?” he suggested simply, before wandering back to the sink.

Tonks stared after him for a second before rushing to catch up, “What do you mean he’s jealous of Remus?”

“Exactly that,” shrugged Bill, “he’s seen the way you look at him, and he should know shouldn’t he, it’s the way you used to look to him.”

“This isn’t fair Bill – you’re making me feel like it was me who dumped him!”

“Wasn’t it?” he asked in surprise.

“No, it was mutual consent actually,” she told him, feeling slightly stung, “too many months of arguments and fights. What’s his problem? So I’ve moved on, so has he! I heard about that Dragon vet, Samala, last year.”

“I’m not getting involved,” he said holding up his hands.

“You just did!” she pointed out, “and I hope you’re not spreading rumours behind my back.”

“Would I do that?” he asked innocently.

“Yes! Don’t even think about it!” she told him almost anxiously, “Can you imagine what everyone would say!”

“So what if they did, it’s only a couple of years difference,” he told her easily.

“Not that anything is going on, because it isn’t, but if it was, I know what everyone would think and they wouldn’t think it was a couple of years difference,” she said, feeling herself dangerously toeing the line between bantering and admitting to Bill, “and it wouldn’t work.”

“Fleur’s a few years younger than me,” he shrugged, giving her a grin, “everyone just forgets after a while.”

“They wouldn’t forget this because it’s me and it’s him,” she said gloomily, before realising what she’d said and added hastily, “hypothetically speaking of course.”

“Of course,” he agreed, before giving her a grin and wrapping a brotherly arm around her shoulder, “but hypothetically speaking, I think you’d be perfect together.”

And with that she gave her smile and wandered off leaving Tonks to stare after him uncertainly. For a second she almost dreamed...before snapping out of it. Stupid Bill, putting ideas in her mind she thought savagely, before glancing at the grandfather clock in the corner.

With a sinking heart she realised it was almost time to start travelling to Azkaban and her newly diminished cell block. She pulled her robes out of her bag and glanced round the kitchen – no one was around now, she could get changed right there. She quickly pulled off her tee-shirt, reaching into her bag and pulling out her extra-thick, charmed jumper. She was about to put it on when she heard something drop out onto the floor. Frowning, she crawled onto her hands and knees, looking under the large table and found her necklace lying there. She raised her hand to her throat, not even remembering taking it off and retrieved it.

She was just fiddling with the clasp when she heard the door behind her swing open and conversation stop.

“Shit!” she exclaimed, reaching for her jumper which was now on the floor, before turning to look at who caught her.

The entire Weasley clan, Remus, Moody – even Kingsley were there – what was everyone doing back so early, hadn’t they just left? Feeling her face flaming she suddenly felt paralysed and stared at everyone staring at her.

Then one of the twins wolf whistled.

“Excellent – peep show!” said the other one happily.

“Fred! George!” scolded Molly, before glaring over at her, “and Tonks! Put some clothes on for goodness sakes.”

Face the colour of the setting sun now she quickly tried to pull her jumper on, which somehow seemed to have twisted and shrunk so that she couldn’t even get it over her head.

“Want some help Tonks?” joked Fred, leer in his voice.

“Fred!” scolded Molly, whilst everyone started to laugh.

“I think this is a two man job,” added George.

“George!” his mother snapped once again.

“Yeah, you can stop staring now!” said Tonks angrily, turning away from everyone and pulling the jumper down – thank god she hadn’t taken off her bra.

“This isn’t a changing room Tonks,” chided Molly.

“I thought no-one was in – obviously,” she said through gritted teeth, turning back to everyone.

She made the supreme mistake of looking over to Remus who had a carefully composed expression on his face that gave absolutely nothing away. Cursing herself for letting him see her acting foolish (more so than usual anyway), she avoided his gaze, feeling suddenly very sick.

“ Well, shows over,” she said angrily, practically ramming her Azkaban robes over her head.

Everyone began to talk between themselves and wander over to the table and she was left fuming to herself in the corner, trying to sort her bag out. She couldn’t believe Remus had been there, anyone but him, she didn’t particular care about any of the others, although Moody worried her slightly, but why him? Why did she always seem to mess everything up? Her happy thoughts from her talk with Bill earlier had completely vanished now.

Perfect for each other? That was a laugh, she’d never seen two people less like each other in the world, they were the dictionary definition of incompatible. She finally got all her stuff packed and

ready to go, and she strode over to the fireplace, desperate to slip away unnoticed.

“You dropped this,” someone said as she searched her pockets for her bag of floo powder.

She felt her insides curl up and cringe once again. Why me, she begged the ceiling, really why me?

“What’s that?” she asked, turning to see Remus holding something out to her.

It was her necklace.

“Oh, the clasp must be broken...thanks...” she said, taking it from him quickly and turned back to the fire, pockets still being searched frantically for a way out.

“I’ve got something else for you to,” he said hopefully, and she frowned at the fireplace, before continuing her search.

“What is it?” she asked, voice muffled as she looked into her bag desperately – ah-ha there it was!

He stepped to the side of her so he could see her and silently handed her something.

“Chocolate?” she said blankly, looking down at the slab of Honeydukes best dark chocolate.

“Just in case,” he said awkwardly, nodding to her robes.

Right, she realised with a sinking heart, Dementors...Azkaban...not actually a gift then, he was giving her medicine...

“I can take care of myself,” she said stiffly, pushing it back into his hands.

She threw a handful of the powder into the fire and yelled 'Diagon Alley' a little louder than she intended. Stepping in the fire she didn't even see the hurt look on his face.

AN/ Well, we're standing on the threshold of a major change in the story, in the words of Rolf Harris 'Can you guess what it is yet?' Hope you enjoyed and for all those patient and BELOVED reviewers, I'd just like to say that the next ten chaps are written save for a few bits and bobs so pending nervous breakdown or divine intervention, things should speed up!

I'm glad I've still got some Remus/Tonks shippers, I thought I might have a revolt on my hands if I tried to post another shock horror> Harry-less scene! I'm trying to go for the double romance see, compare the way Tonks/Remus go about it, compared to Harry/Kitty!

enchantedlight,

Ladieraiel (know what you mean rolls eyes> men!)

Fission25 (you must be my sole Tonks/Remus shipper! And I love the fact its poor Kitty, not bloody kitty!)

Smurkle Snap,

John Steppenwolf(don't care about Man U, I'm Wolves at heart, thought for sake of accuracy though I wouldn't have them in the FA cup! And Rod sang with the group for a few months while they were the Ravens before Ray came on board etc...)

Salintere a.k.a. Jon (Thanks chuck! Shipper is someone who roots for a certain couple to get together, comes from relationship, hence shipper!)

Boy here in this sinful wor...(sorry chuck, but I'm going for the double relationship story, so you'll have to put up with a bit of NT/RL for me! Humble not deluded!)

harrison potter (patience is a virtue she says! Not long to wait yet, still a bit of setting up before the crashing down! And publishing pairings takes all the mystery out of a story!)

john(sorry chuck but writers prerogative, NT/RL stay!)

AzureSky123

Arya

Kyizi (I'm glad someone appreciates my Tonks/Lupin storyline! I was beginning to feel all lost at sea – I loved the bikini bit too, totally be able to visualise that!)

Jeefus (hehehe, all your questions and more shall be answered verrrrrryyyyy shortly)

kabab (lolls, as you can see – wish granted! I am positively fairy godmother-like in status! And as to Harry and magic, he's perfectly able to cast spells now, he's just not choosing too! See why later on!)

FroBoy

Junky (I'm sorry, but at the mo, Gathering Storm isn't really being added to, I may eventually I just feel like it's too far into the actual series to be writing a post book 4 story!)

ShadowObscurity (that must have taken you a fair bit of time to read through! Glad you liked!)

realfanficts (hahaha, there's no such thing as writers block now, I've got the next 10 chapters written bar a few missing/incomplete scenes!)

Amerision (you've got some good ideas chuck, fancy writing for me? And don't worry, your wish is my command, sort of...)



## Chapter Sixteen

All Parents damage their children,

It cannot be helped,

Youth, like pristine glass,

Absorbs the prints of its handlers,

Some parents smudge,

Others crack,

A few shatter childhood completely into jagged pieces,

Beyond repair.

Donna wandered into the kitchen, putting on the kettle whilst she rang her mother and arranged when to pick up baby Jason. She rooted around in the fridge for some time before pulling out a half eaten can of macaroni cheese, emptying it into a bowl and placing it in the microwave. She guessed Harry was either asleep or out whilst Kitty was at work and she sprawled out on the sofa and she tried to enjoy her half an hour of peace before she had to go to work.

“It’s one ‘o’clock, it’s time for the BBC news with me, Michel Burke.”

She didn’t particularly feel like listening to the doom and gloom of the nation but was too far away from the remote and too lazy to get up and channel.

“...the breakout occurred in the early hours of the morning and officials are yet to comment on the cause...”

Donna got up at the beep of the microwave, quickly fetching her food and moving back into the lounge, this sounded like big news.

“...the public are warned that the escapees are armed and highly dangerous. On no account must you approach the individuals. If you have any information please contact the police immediately...”

She gave an irritated sigh, she'd missed them saying where the prisoners had broken out from, for all she knew it could be the local prison. The picture of three people were flashed up onto the screen, a young man with long black hair who looked far too charming to be in prison, an oldish looking woman whose sallow features contrasted sharply with the youths, and finally a sneering man with long blonde hair.

“...have been named as Klaus Saracen, Morgana Grimbit and Lucius Malfoy.”

Donna stared at the pictures, macaroni half raised to her mouth as the newscaster reeled off the list of offences the prisoners had apparently committed, which included murder. She gave a shudder, wondering if they'd tell her where they'd escaped from again, but there was no such luck. The news switched now to a massive pile-up on the M5.

When she'd finished her dinner she returned to the kitchen and washed her mug and cutlery, tidied up the mess that Kitty had obviously left littered about before retuning to the tv, now the local news was on. She gave an irritated sigh as she stretched back out on the sofa and tried to relax, Kitty had stopped being merely a pain in the neck, now she was a worry. She wondered for perhaps the millionth time what the deal was between her and Harry, he seemed like such a nice guy, a bit too secretive for her liking but he didn't deserve this...

She was glad Kitty was at work till this evening, she didn't think that in her current mood she could stand her making an appearance-

“Catherine Earl was reported missing over a week ago after a disturbance at her home in Crawley, Surrey...”

Donna spat out her drink, sitting upright and choking slightly as she saw an old photo of Kitty plastered across the tv screen.

“The sixteen year old was last seen leaving this block of flats on Tower Street in the early hours of Sunday morning and is possibly injured after a violent argument broke out between herself and her stepfather, who was arrested only days ago for his part in a cocaine racket in the county.”

She mouthed silently for a moment in utter disbelief, before looking over her shoulder.

“Harry!” she called out loud urgently, “HARRY?”

She heard a thump from her room and only seconds Harry skidded into the room looking dishevelled, obviously just having woken up.

“What?” he asked quickly, looking positively terrified, “What is it?”

She merely turned to the tv and whispered, “Look...”

“...thought to have been sighted recently in Wolverhampton, where she lived until recently. The police are urging anyone with any information as to her whereabouts to contact them immediately on the special missing person’s helpline running across the bottom of your screens now...A reward is available for information leading to the successful location of the teenager.”

The two presenters looked grim for a moment, before perking up and bantering lightly as the weather man stood forward. Donna turned back to Harry, who was staring at the tv where Kitty’s photo had been seconds before. He looked dumbstruck.

“What do you think of that?” she asked in astonishment.

“What did they say?”

“Just that she was missing, possibly injured after your run in with Ian and that she’s been sighted here...”

Harry dropped into the sofa next to her, still staring at the screen, slightly open mouthed. Donna watched him for a long moment, he looked pale and worried, a little too worried for a mere missing persons report and she wondered why.

“We ought to ring her,” Donna said after a moment, picking up the phone.

“She’ll be working,” he told her, before beginning to bite his thumbnail.

“She’ll have her mobile on,” Donna said, already punching in the number.

It rang for a long while before it was picked up.

“Battersea Dog’s Home?”

“Very funny, Caz,” said Donna sarcastically as she heard laughter on the other end of the phone.

“Oh, you sound pissed off,” giggled Kitty, “if it’s about the washing up, I was leaving it to soak because I sort of burned the-”

“You were just on telly,” she cut in and there was a momentary silence on the end of the line.

“Say again?”

“On the local news, they had your photo up and everything,” Donna said and Kitty was silent on the other end, “apparently you’re a Missing Person - reward and all. Me and Harry just saw it.”

Kitty didn’t say anything and Donna could hear a gang of voices in the background demanding to know what was going on.

“That’s not possible,” she said finally, “who would have reported me?”

“I don’t know, but whoever it was they want you back pretty badly if they’re putting up a reward,” Donna told her.

“Right...” Kitty said slowly, “right...ok...I better come back, don’t you think? Figure this out...”

“Aren’t you at work?” she asked, frowning slightly at the sounds in the background, it didn’t sound like her café.

Harry looked across at this, frowning slightly.

“Yeah of course I am,” she said quickly, “I’m sure they’ll let me leave...”

Donna frowned even more, she could hear a guy’s voice in the background shouting ‘crazy girl can’t leave now, party’s just started!’

“Yeah sure,” she said finally, “bye then.”

“Tarra a bit,” Kitty said, hanging up.

Donna hung up the phone and turned back to Harry who was watching her closely.

“Was she not at work?” he asked in confusion.

“Yeah she was,” lied Donna quickly, “I could just hear the kitchen staff in the background.”

“Oh right,” he said, still frowning slightly.

She couldn’t tell if he believed her or not and Donna could help feel another flash of annoyance at Kitty - why was she doing this? And why was she still lying for her?

She looked over to Harry who looked slightly uncertain of what to do next and once again Donna wondered why he seemed so spooked by the news.

“I’m just going to go...have a shower,” he said suddenly, climbing to his feet.

“Hey Harry?” she called and he spun around wearily.

“Yeah?”

“You okay?” she asked, sounding almost worried

“Fine,” Harry replied, desperately wanting to be on his own now.

“You know what, I haven’t spoken much to you lately,” she said suddenly, “fancy a cup of tea before I go to work?”

He gave an inward sigh, knowing there wasn’t really anyway he could refuse...

“Erm...Sure,” he shrugged, following her into the kitchen.

She flicked on the kettle and turned to him, arms folded across her stomach as she leant against the counter.

“You’re looking a little worse for wear,” she noted and he gave an inward laugh of incredulity, she was always so polite.

“I’m fine,” he replied, giving her a slight smile for proof.

“Still having nightmares?” she asked.

He gave a start of surprise, glancing at her quickly.

“Caz told me,” she said in answer to his unspoken question.

“Oh, right,” he said hollowly, feeling a sudden flash of annoyance at Kitty, “no, I’m fine...”

“Hmm,” she replied, beginning the well practised ritual of tea-making, occasionally glancing at him.

Harry stared at the table blankly, desperately wanting to hurry her up, surely she must know by now that he could see right through her? In which case, why did she have to go through the whole rigmarole of pretending to be sweet and innocent every time before she got around to voicing what was on her mind.

“Missing your family?” she asked suddenly.

The idea of Harry missing the Dursley’s was so funny that Harry couldn’t help laughing out loud suddenly at the thought, before pressing his lips tightly together.

“Not at all,” he added, unable to stop smiling at the thought of his sobbing into his pillow at night over not seeing Dudley’s spoilt, fat face.

“There isn’t anyone you miss?” she inquired, handing him a mug.

Perhaps this wasn’t a Kitty-bashing conversation after all Harry thought vaguely, she seemed genuinely curious. An image of Hermione and Ron rose into his mind unbidden, sitting in the common room, reading a book and playing chess like they had on so many countless nights in Gryffindor Tower. He wondered what they were doing now, what they thought about him...

“Harry?” prompted Donna.

“What? Oh, er no, not really,” he said, taking a deep swig of his tea so he didn’t have to elaborate further.

“Honestly?” she asked, eyebrow raised as she slid into the seat opposite.

He didn't reply he was too busy trying to banish the image of Sirius from his mind now, if there was one person he missed more than anyone, it was Sirius. Because he knew Ron was at the Burrow, Hermione at the end of a phone line, Dumbledore at Hogwarts, even Remus and the Order was at Grimauld Place.

But he didn't know where Sirius was.

"People run away for a lot of different reasons I've realised," she began thoughtfully, watching him closely, "people like Caz do because they haven't got anything keeping them somewhere. Nothing to lose, you know what I mean?"

"Yeah," he agreed, thinking of Kitty's parents and family.

"But other people...they run away because they can't face something," she said quietly, eyes shining, "something that's happened to them that's so bad, they're willing to give up everything..."

Harry didn't say anything, skin tingling as an icy cold feeling crept over him.

"What happened to you, Harry?" she whispered.

For a moment he couldn't stop the storm of memories from the past few months flood back, the Department of Mysteries, the veil, the torture of being possessed by Voldemort, the nightmares, the Prophecy...

"Nothing," he managed to choke out.

"Something did Harry," she pressed, "what was it?"

"Why do you want to know?" he tried to joke, voice coming out shaky and nervous.

"Because I'm worried about you," she told him seriously.



He stared at her for a moment. This was Donna. Donna who hated Kitty. Who was persistently trying to break them up. Who made waspish comments about him when she thought he wasn't listening.

"Why?" he asked blankly.

"Because," she began, before sighing and changing her mind. She looked up at Harry, "Caz knows what she's doing - she's been doing this since before she can remember. She likes doing it, she's been forced to...But you, you don't need to live this life Harry. Skipping from place to place, never knowing if you're going to have a roof over your head tomorrow, or food. You're capable of so much more!"

Harry stared at her for a moment, too shocked to speak.

"W-what do you mean by that?" he asked in a tight throat.

"Get out while you still can," she said, "before you wake up one day and realise that you've been running for so long that there's no chance of turning back, that they won't forgive you, that there's nowhere to run back to."

Donna watched him silently for a moment as confused thoughts jostled for position in his mind. On one level he was almost suspicious of her, that this was just another scheme to break him up with Kitty, but perhaps Donna was right. She was saying what Kitty was avoiding, he just couldn't figure out why...

"You're not going to take my advice are you? Because you don't trust me, do you?" she asked him finally, still leant towards him.

Harry shrugged, unsure of what to say.

She almost looked hurt.

"I don't blame you," she told him simply, "you haven't caught me at my best. Caz coming back here, back to me...I'm not going to pretend I liked it - but I was prepared to forgive and forget the past,

you know? Willing to have my old Caz back, the one I had before times got bad.”

“So, why haven’t you then?” he asked.

“Because Harry,” she whispered, leaning towards him even closer, “you brought me back the wrong Caz. She’s no better than before in the bad old days. She’s on the edge Harry and she’s going to fall.”

“What do you mean fall?” he asked breathlessly, unable to feel angered by her when she was being so honest.

“She’s going to crash and burn Harry,” she said fearfully, “and you know exactly what I mean. The other night when she went missing, the state she was in when she got back, that’s the beginning.”

“Don’t worry, she promised me she won’t drink anymore,” he told her quickly.

“Drinking’s not the problem Harry,” she told him.

“What does that mean?”

“Ask Caz,” she merely said, before leaning forward anxiously once more, “And don’t believe her. How many times do you think she’s promised me that? Her friends that? That’ll she’ll stop, that it’s the last time, that she’s going to change - she can’t change Harry.”

“She can,” he struggled, feeling suddenly claustrophobic, “you’re just being vindictive...remembering the past. She’s changed...”

“Maybe I am, and maybe she has...” Donna said, picking at the rim of her mug now with a bitten down nail, “but that just means I’m prepared, that I can recognise the signs when I see them. That night, that was a sign, all those evenings when she’s been out and you didn’t know where she was, when she was late back from work or running errands, those guys who brought her back...she just told us she was at work, but do you believe her? They’re all signs Harry.”

“Of what?”

“That you’re Kitty is doing what she’s best at, messing up her life - except this time it isn’t just her that’s going to have to face the consequences, it’s going to be you too. She’s going to hurt you Harry and she won’t even realise it, because that’s the kind of person she is,” Donna told him, eyes boring into his now.

“She won’t,” Harry told her firmly.

“ She will, and that’s what’ll hurt the most, that it was so unexpected,” Donna said sadly, “if you never trust me on anything else in your life Harry, trust me on this, please. Leave before it’s too late, before Caz gets to bad, before those people you miss give up on you, before there isn’t anywhere else to go back to.”

Harry couldn’t speak, he simply stared at Donna for a long time. Finally she gave an angry huff and stood up suddenly, making him jump slightly.

“You know what, I don’t know why I’m bothering,” she muttered, apparently angry at him, “she’s got you wrapped around her little finger and you’re too blind to even see what’s going on!”

She stormed out of the room and Harry jumped up quickly to follow her.

“Donna!” he called, hurrying into the living room, “I...thanks for the advice...but it’s ok...things are different now, ok?”

“Whatever,” she said shortly, “pretend all you like Harry - but why don’t you try looking me in the eye and telling me everything is under control - that you’re not worried!”

“I’m not,” he lied quickly.

Donna just looked at him for a moment and began to laugh.

“Good answer Harry, real convincing,” she scoffed, “so that’s that, you sure told me. But here’s my final piece because I don’t believe in flogging a dead horse ok? Whatever happens to you after tomorrow, good luck, because you brought it upon yourself and you have to deal with the consequences! At least I can say I tried to help you!”

She grabbed her bag and her coat and walked towards the front door in silence.

“Donna wait!” he called after her, “What happens tomorrow?”

“I’m kicking you out! Caz isn’t welcome here anymore, not after yesterday! You’re on your own!”

Only twenty minutes later Harry was leaning against the kitchen counter, watching the kettle boil, deep in thought. There was so much he had to think about he didn’t know where to start - Donna’s accusations, Kitty’s stint on tv...

He knew however that her appearance on tv and his noticeable absence meant that he had a pretty good idea who’d suddenly be trying to find Kitty, and it definitely wasn’t any of those people she’d left on the estate. First Tonks calling him, now this, the Order was pretty insistent on getting him back now.

But he found he didn’t really care about that right now, so what if she’d been on the tv? What did it matter? He was more worried about what Donna had to say - had Kitty really been lying to him all this time? Who was she always meeting, where did she go when she told him she was at work?

Why couldn’t she tell him?

“Harry!” a voice called suddenly.

He gave a start and looked over at the clock. It had taken her only twenty minutes to get home. Her work was at least 45 minutes away.

“I’m in the kitchen,” he replied.

Kitty entered the kitchen, wearing her work uniform and an anxious expression.

“So what did it say?” she asked instantly, forgetting all formality of meeting and greeting, “Exactly, what did it say?”

“I only saw the last bit, Donna shouted for me,” he replied, turning to face her, “but they said you’d be sighted in Wolverhampton recently, for anyone with information to contact the police, and that there was a reward.”

“Je-sus Christ,” she muttered, almost to herself.

Harry just watched her as she dropped into the chair at the kitchen table, unable to think of anything to say. He couldn’t share her worry when he was still reeling from his argument with Donna. Should he just confront her, put his mind at rest? Or would that just make things worse?

Kitty pulled out her cigarettes and lit one, smoking in a kind of mechanical way he’d noticed she sometimes did when she was deeply thinking - as if she wasn’t even aware she was doing it.

“Don’t worry about it Kitty,” Harry tried, unable to come up with anything more comforting just yet.

She scoffed slightly, flicking her cigarette ash onto a plate on the table. He studied her closely and for the first time since she’d come in and he realised she seemed quite worried.

“If,” she began, pausing the light up and turn to him, “if someone sees that thing, and rings that number...do you have any idea what’s going to happen?”

He stared at her silently.

She gave another huff of frustration, “If the police find me they’re going to drag me back to Surrey, put me into foster care or something when they realise there’s no one to take me in! And there’s no way

some family is going to decide to take in a readymade teenager - they want little babies and all that crap! So I'm going to be stuck in some fucking group home or orphanage or something!"

He was quite shocked by her reaction - Harry hadn't even thought of the consequences of what would happen if someone recognised and reported her. Now, he realised, was not the time to start grilling her about Donna's accusations.

"Kitty, that's not going to happen!" Harry said, sliding into the seat opposite her, "who's going to know...who'll ring up?"

"There's a fucking reward Harry!" she exclaimed, "Anyone would ring up for that - people from the estate, people from work!"

Harry didn't know what to say, she was right of course, there was plenty of people who knew where she was now, and he'd bet his last galleon on the fact that as soon as Kitty was taken back to Surrey, the Order would be there to pick her up.

"There's no way I'm going back," she said fiercely, "no fucking way - police and social services and all that crap!"

Harry stood up and placed his hands on her arms, trying to force her calm down.

"Listen, Kitty, this isn't the end of the world," he told her firmly, "it just means that we're going to have to leave here a little bit sooner than you wanted."

"Not the end of the world!" she countered angrily, "How can you be so two-faced! This is all your fault!"

"My fault?" he demanded quickly, dropping his arms to his side, "How is this my fault?"

"Oh come on Harry," she scoffed, flicking away the cigarette butt, "all the way back I've tried to figure out who would want me back so badly they'd put up a reward! And I couldn't figure out why for ages!"

And here was me sitting here thinking, who would possibly care that I'd left? No one, that's who, I burned all my bridges! So why would someone want me back? What's so important about me?"

"Nothing. Nothing is. Nothing except who I'm with, right? They just want you back, don't they - and they know I'm with you, don't they?" she demanded, hands on her hips, "first that freaky woman's stalking me on my mobile and now my face is all over the regional news!"

Harry must have looked shocked at her quick thinking because her features softened suddenly.

"You didn't realise did you?" she stated, looking almost upset that she'd accused him.

Harry hesitated. Of course he realised, he knew as soon as he'd seen that news broadcast. But he didn't want her tell her. He thought of all the secrets Donna had accused her of keeping and a reckless feeling overcame him.

If she lied to him, then why couldn't he return the favour?

"I didn't think of that," he said finally.

He didn't even feel guilty for lying.

She gave a heavy sigh and dropped onto the bench, face buried in her hands.

"It's not your fault, Harry," she said in a muffled voice, "you're past always catches up with you eventually, no matter how fast you run..."

Her words made him feeling almost sick and in the muggy evening air all the hairs on the back of his neck stood on end.

"Eugh, I don't know what to do...this has never happened to me before..." she said, not noticing his silence.

He had been so busy thinking about Kitty, again, that he hadn't even stopped to think whether the Order would be walking through the front door any second. Would they find him now? He imagined Dumbledore's face, the look of disappointment, like he'd let him down...

"We have to leave," he told her finally.

Despite the arguments, despite the lies, the secrets, he still needed her.

She looked over to Harry and he dared her to make another excuse, put it off for another day...

"Wait until Donna gets back, I have to say good bye this time," she replied heavily.

Harry almost laughed out loud, like Donna would really want to talk to Kitty again.

"We'll leave tonight?" he asked, trying to make it clear what he wanted.

"Tonight."

"Let's pack then."

Harry and Kitty were sat waiting in the bedroom of Donna's flat for her to come home. Their bags were both packed and propped up by the door, their coats sling over the top of them. It was five 'o' clock and she would arrive any minute hopefully, Kitty was going to say her goodbye and they were finally going to leave.

They were sitting on the floor next to each other, backs leaning against the bed as they waited in silence. Harry didn't really think he was capable of sustaining any conversation right at that moment, he already had enough to think about with everything Donna had said.

Somehow he'd managed to convince himself that all their troubles were tied up with being in Wolverhampton, with this flat and with



Donna, and if they could just get away...A new start, a new slate. Harry didn't have to know what Kitty had done, if she'd done anything at all.

"Harry?" asked Kitty a while later.

"Hmm?"

She had her hand intertwined with his and was tapping it against her knee thoughtfully.

"Did you ever wonder what you'd do when you left school?"

He looked over to her in surprise.

"Where did that come from?" he asked blankly.

"Oh, nowhere," she mused, still tapping her hand, "just curious..."

In truth Harry had been harbouring a desire to become an Auror for a long time now, he had been awaiting his OWL results before he left, on the verge of finding out whether Snape would accept him on his course or not. He guessed he could kiss goodbye to that dream now...

"But did you?" she pressed suddenly.

Harry thought for a moment.

"I was more concentrated on surviving school to think about afterwards."

She gave a slight laugh and he wondered what she'd say if he told her that was the literal truth - that if he'd stayed he would have been lucky to see 18.

"What about you?"

“Same here I guess, except I didn’t really manage to survive school eh? No grades, no prospects,” she said in mock-sadness, “guess I’ll be a waitress all my life.”

“What about your drawing?” he asked, thinking of the pictures he’d seen in her sketchbook.

“What about it?”

“Well, why don’t you do that? Be an artist,” he told her, “go to art college.”

She looked at him as if he’d suddenly turned into an alien for a moment before bursting out laughing. He smiled faintly at her reaction.

“Very funny,” she snickered when she’d finally calmed down.

“I’m being serious.”

“Yeah, I can see me in college!” she said incredulously, “proper academic me.”

“You don’t need to be academic to be an artist, do you?” he said easily, “and your stuff was a million times better than some of that stuff in the gallery.”

“You’re very sweet sometimes Harry,” she laughed, “but not entirely truthful methinks.”

“Fine, don’t believe me,” he shrugged, “be a waitress all your life.”

“What, and that’s not good enough for you?” she teased, moving so she sat on his lap now, facing him.

“Not as good as an artist,” he said sweetly.

“Ooh, well we wouldn’t want the mighty and powerful Harry Potter to have a lowly waitress for a girlfriend would we?” she asked in mock-

amazement, "Especially when he has such a brilliant and high-flying unemployed bum!"

"Shut up," he said with a smirk, "you can have enough prestige for both of us."

"Wouldn't want to steal your limelight," she continued, "are you sure there's anything you want to do? I've always fancied going out with someone with a really dangerous job."

Harry's smile flickered slightly.

"How about, stuntman?" she asked, obviously not noticing.

"Nah," he replied, recovering well, "too painful."

"Professional skydiver?"

"I have a problem with jumping out of planes with only silk tied to my back."

"Sumo wrestler?"

"You have to wear a nappy," he pointed out, "and put on about 50 stone!"

"Secret agent?"

"Then you'd never know," he said, slightly taken aback, "that's the whole point of it being secret."

"True - how about an assassin, very cloak and dagger!" she whispered melodramatically as he spluttered slightly, "I could black your knives for you and hand you fresh guns or something."

"How about I don't get a death-defying job?" he replied, feeling uneasy with the game now.

She pouted slightly, "Fine, fine...how about formula 1 racing driver?"

"I can't drive."

"Ah-ha, but next year you can! We should take our tests and get a really old banga, travel down to Cornwall and do all that surfing-type bumming around the coast they always show in the movies!" she said excitedly, "That'd be cool right? We could get a pop-up tent and do fishing and all that seaside type stuff!"

"Sounds nice," Harry laughed, taken aback by a sudden thought.

Next year? That was so far away he couldn't even begin to imagine it. And as Kitty and him carried on outlining all of the things they'd do if they had a car, Harry came to realise that he had seemed to have forgotten everything Donna had said to him. He didn't care about Kitty's secrets, Kitty's past, because now they were leaving and they would put it all behind them.

And have a fresh start.

Donna was alone in the kitchen, pouring herself a cup of tea when the front door opened. A few moments later Kitty walked into the kitchen, caught sight of Donna and hesitated.

"Hiya chuck," she said, walking into the room slowly, "I'm glad you're back finally, I wanted to speak to you about something...where've you been?"

"Big hoo-ha at work tonight, Mrs Hogkins died so...plenty of extra work."

Her answer was spoken very bluntly, and Kitty frowned at her slightly - she sounded very off.

"That's terrible," she said, slightly awkwardly, before glancing over to baby Jason sitting in the high chair, watching them silently.

"Well she was old," Donna said, voice still stiff and concealing something, "and crazy. We've already got another poor bugger lined

up for her room - welcome to the wonderful world of care working, laugh a minute."

Kitty sighed slightly and wondered how to broach the subject of her and Harry leaving.

"Where have you been?" she asked.

Kitty moved over to the kitchen table, "Picking up some dinner for me and Harry."

She placed a plastic bag on the counter and the smell of Chinese food wafted past her. Donna however just gave a disbelieving snort.

"That's your fourth take-away this week, feeling guilty about something?" she asked lightly, "I thought Harry paid for everything?"

"I pay my way," Kitty snapped, before smiling once again and finding some plates.

The tension in the air was almost tangible, it felt like a huge black cloud, descending upon them both and suffocating them. They both knew that something had to be said but at the moment they were toeing the line between war and peace.

"I'll just go get Harry," said Kitty suddenly, already backing out of the room.

"He's not in," Donna said and Kitty stared at her for a moment.

"What? Why not?" she demanded, "Where is he?"

"Went for a walk a while back I guess," she shrugged.

She glanced over at Kitty, she looked extremely worried by the news.

"Perhaps he was tired of waiting for you to come back?" she said frankly, "again."

“He knows I was getting dinner,” she snapped again, “I’ve only been gone half an hour. He should be here...”

“Oh well...He’s probably used to waiting around for you by now,” Donna replied nastily.

“What’s that supposed to mean?” demanded Kitty, turning to her friend now.

There was no point in avoiding the argument any longer.

“Oh nothing,” she said. “By the way, I just thought you’d like to know I popped into your work yesterday, thought I’d get some lunch on the house, turns out you’re boss said you’d walked out the day before.”

Kitty glared daggers at her, “Checking up on me?”

“Good job I did really wasn’t it?” she said loudly, “you’re fucking lucky Harry doesn’t visit you, aren’t you?”

Kitty slammed the tin she was holding down on the counter angrily.

“Why would you be lying to him I wonder?”

“All I wonder about is what the fuck this has got to do with you?” Kitty retorted.

“You’re lying to him!” Donna said, blatantly ignoring her.

“Donna, it’s nothing to do with you!” she replied forcefully.

“He trusts you!”

“Donna!” she practically yelled back and there was silence for a moment.

They stared at each other for a moment, both unable to back down, but too angry to continue. Donna recognised Kitty’s stance, when she

got angry she always got threatening, a trick she'd learnt from her stepbrothers.

"You're not going to scare me into silence this time," Donna said, voice shaking but serious, "you are going to listen to what I have to say because god damn it, someone has got to make you see what you're doing!"

"I'm not doing anything."

"Is that what you tell yourself, to make yourself feel better?" she asked incredulously, "I'm beginning to think you actually believe that, that you've managed to delude yourself to the point where you don't know what real and what's not anymore-"

"Shut up," growled Kitty suddenly.

"No I won't!" Donna said loudly, "I gave up worrying about you a long time ago! I don't care what you do with your life anymore, I don't, but it's not just about you anymore! Harry is-"

"Don't you dare bring him into this," she threatened, "you don't know anything about Harry!"

"And you do?" questioned Donna.

Kitty was silent for a good few seconds and Donna laughed nastily at her.

"Leave him out of this," Kitty said finally.

"What, do you have exclusive rights on him now or something?" she demanded, "Am I not allowed to worry about him as a friend?"

Kitty just laughed nastily for a moment at this comment, shaking her head at Donna.

"As a friend? Are you kidding me?"

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Donna demanded, angry at her reaction.

“It means, why don’t you just stop pretending how you feel about him?” she hissed, “it’s getting old.”

“How I feel about him?” repeated Donna flatly.

“Yeah! Why don’t you stop pretending how worried you are about my bad influence on him,” she told her loudly, “he’s with me, not you, ok?”

“I don’t have a thing for Harry,” she protested, cheeks flushing darkly, “I’m with Greg.”

“Je-sus Christ Donna! Do you think I’m blind?” Kitty laughed incredulously, “All you do is stare at him, or think up a reason to go into the kitchen when he’s in there or another really great way to slag me off in front of him! Do you think I wouldn’t notice you’ve been trying to break us up since the day we got here!”

“If I have any feelings for Harry, they’re pity, believe you and me!” she retorted, looking furious, “You’re going to screw him up Caz! All the lies, all the secrets, they’ll come out! They always do.”

“I am not lying to him!” Kitty practically yelled back.

“Caz, he still thinks you were drunk that night for Christ’s sake!” Donna shouted incredulously, “He was actually asking me whether I thought you were an alcoholic! I didn’t have the heart to explain to him because he was so worried about you already! And he knows something’s up, he’s already getting suspicious, losing his patience with you! He really cares Caz, and you don’t even give a shit, do you?”

Kitty turned away, leaning against the counter, knuckles white with the pressure of her grip.



“You can’t even begin to understand what I’m feeling,” she replied in a difficult voice.

“Oh, you’re right,” she replied sarcastically, “I couldn’t possibly fathom what’s going on with you, it’s such a mystery! Come on Caz, you’re forgetting that unlike Harry, I know you. I know what you’re capable of and I know what you’re doing. And I’m here to tell you that it stops right now. You can’t do this to us, not again!”

Donna was almost crying now and Kitty was silent for a moment before replying.

“Nothings happening.”

“Shall I ask Jed if nothing’s happening? Or Dijon? Or Banksy?” accused Donna, “What’s a matter? No snappy come back, no denial? No perfectly rational excuse for your state the other night, for all those evenings returning late? No reason why you’re telling Harry you finish work at five when I’ve been there to walk home with you and you’re boss tells me you finish at 3 every day?”

“Come on Caz! Explain! Come on! But you can’t can you? Because you’re just doing what comes naturally, aren’t you? Because you can’t help it, because you can’t even see that you’ve been offered this golden opportunity - chances like the one Harry’s giving you come along once in a lifetime! And you’re screwing it up! You’re going to hurt him and yourself...Are you trying to mess your life up?”

“Donna,” began Kitty, in a voice that was shaking with suppressed emotion, “what I do with my life is up to me. And you may not believe me about this, but I’m sorry about what happened before I left. But I’ve changed now, and Harry knows it-”

“Yeah, you seem so sorry about what happened,” scoffed Donna, “fucking inconsolable! Did you even shed a tear for what happened? Or were you too busy running away to save your own skin!”

“It wasn’t my fault,” she whispered back, “I couldn’t help her. We have to move on...that’s the past...”

“Carla’s DEAD Caz!” Donna practically screamed, “Do you understand that! DO YOU? And you want to move on, forget about it!”

“I don’t want to talk about this anymore,” Kitty said abruptly, voice quaking.

“Yeah sure, course you don’t! You’re fucking guilty as sin and-”

“Leave me alone Donna,” Kitty replied, backing away from the conversation.

“Fine, do you know what? I will! Because I don’t want to think about this anymore! I don’t want to have to grieve anymore! Not for Carla, or for you! I don’t want to stand back and watch you fuck up again. I don’t want to have to go to another funeral, not yours, not Harry’s.”

“Don’t say that...” she whispered.

“What, you can live the life as long as no one points it out to you? Because you know that when someone says those magic words, that you’re just like your mom, you know then it’ll be real! That you’ve become everything you hate. That you’re gonna end up as fucked up as her! Alone! Killing yourself because even your own daughter couldn’t stand the sight of you!”

“Don’t...”

“Why, I’ve got nothing to lose? I want you to think about this seriously Caz - if you meet those guys again, if you carry on like this. You’re going to lose Harry, and then...” she paused, before adding simply, “you’re fucked.”

“Donna...please,” Kitty pleaded, “stop...”

“Fine, ok, I will! This is me washing my hands of you forever. Just do me a favour and...and leave.”

“Leave?” Kitty repeated quietly.

“Leave and don’t ever come back,” she said bitterly, “I don’t ever want to see you again.”

Kitty, whose back was still turned to Donna seemed to be unable to even reply to this. She gave a shuddering breath and then ran out of the room. A few seconds later Donna heard the front door slam shut and there was silence in the flat. Donna raised her hand to her face as the tears welled up and she began to sob. She couldn’t seem to stop, it felt as if a giant hand was just squeezing and squeezing her chest and the despair of the situation took over her.

She couldn’t be in the flat anymore, she wouldn’t come back until Kitty was gone. She jumped up, scooping baby Jason into her arms and practically running from the flat, still sobbing. The door slammed shut and the sound reverberating around the silent flat.

And then, somewhere in the darkness, there was the sound of someone breathing in shakily.

In a bedroom, door propped open, Harry sat on the bed, knees drawn up to his chest and arms wrapped around his head.

Tonks tried to pull more blankets over her but the chill of the place seemed to be creeping into her very bones. Towards the end of her shifts at Azkaban she usually felt so badly affected by what she called the ‘spooky vibes’ that she could hardly bear to drag herself back into the real world. And now she had not one, but three shifts to do before she could get away.

Wages rose by 20 if you did more than one shift in a row, 40 if you do three and Friday was another pay-day for those damn goblins.

She was allowed a three hour break and she was desperately trying to get any sort of sleep she possibly could, wishing desperately she hadn’t been so pig-headed and refused Remus’ chocolate. There was nothing she needed more than a big chunk of finest chocolate to suck on.

Azkaban really wasn't the best place for her she'd come to realise, she seemed to feel the after effects of the Dementors a lot more than a lot of the other sentinels did. Maybe it was because she was the youngest, or perhaps because she had such a sunny disposition usually, but there were times she swore there were still Dementors here. It was so strong sometimes, that she felt like it was right behind her and she'd taken to walking around wand out, practising the patronus silently.

She heard a blood-curdling scream a long way off down the corridor and she closed her eyes wearily – why was she here?

Harry hadn't moved from his position when he'd heard Kitty and Donna's argument almost two hours ago. He didn't know what to do, how to feel, how to act...Everything Donna had told him...what did it mean? Where was Kitty now? Had she really been lying to him all this time?

Everything had been going so well. He'd managed to brush it all away earlier, they'd been getting ready to go, leaving the past behind them, but still bad things kept happening to him. He gritted his teeth as his scar gave a violent throb of pain and he clamped his hand over his forehead.

“Voldemort's happy,” he suddenly blurted out, voice sounding scratchy and croaky, “something he's been waiting for is nearly ready...”

After a moment he shook his head and looked up - what was all that about? He didn't care about Voldemort right now, or magic, or Death Eaters, all he wanted to think about was Kitty...

What was she doing?

Who were these guys she was seeing?

What happened to her friend Carla?

Why did Donna think being with Kitty would end in his funeral?

His scar throbbed again and he looked up for the first time in hours - it was dark now, through the curtain he could see the stars were coming out. He rubbed his face with his hands, unable to shake the feeling of impending disaster as he got to his feet.

He would ring Kitty. He would ask her to come home. He would talk about it with her. She would tell him everything was going to be ok.

And then he moved to leave the room when his gaze fell upon her backpack. He stared at it for a long time, just thinking, as the devil on his shoulder whispered in his ear, maybe it would hold some answers...He thought of all the things he hid in his bag, what if she was the same? Without even thinking about it he found himself moving over to her sleeping bag and sitting down, pulling the bag between his legs.

Reaching into his pocket he found the Spy Snitch and let it out.

“Show me the front door,” he whispered at it, watching it zoom off on the small lid of the box.

A few moments later he was greeted by the locked front door and he laid the box next to him, where he could see it. He turned back to the bag and the smallest of voices in his mind was telling him he shouldn't do what he already knew he was going to do. That secrets were the most dangerous thing he could unleash.

But he had to know.

By some unknown command from his brain, he found his hand flipping back the flap of the bag and pulling the drawstring open. Feeling his heart pounding he looked into the depths and was greeted by a mass of crumpled up clothes – if it were not for the fact that he hid things at the bottom of his bag he would have stopped then, discouraged by the lack of skeletons leaping from the proverbial cupboard.

He pulled the clothes out, slowly at first before suddenly he was aware that his hand had hit something solid and he stopped suddenly

to find clothes strewn about him. But he didn't care about the mess, his mind was fixed entirely on the item his fingers were now curled around and pulling out of the bag; an envelope.

It was thick and bound together by an elastic band, which he undid carefully. Slowly he opened it up, before gasping as he saw what was inside it.

It was a wad of money, a very thick wad of money. He had a terrible, ominous feeling about the fact that Kitty was carrying well over £600 in her bag, this from the girl that was constantly telling Harry how broke she was, how she'd always got by on less, that they couldn't leave till she picked up her wages...he couldn't even begin to think about where she'd got the money from.

He stared at it for sometime, desperately trying to come up with an explanation before the sudden loud sound from the next door neighbours distracted him. He looked around in confusion before placing the money aside, he'd figure that out later. He delved in again, searching fingers almost immediately finding something which he pulled out and stared at – a wallet. A brief look at the credit cards and family photo in it told him it didn't belong to Kitty and he also threw this aside, reaching in quickly and pulling out another one. And another, and another...

There were six in total, all belonging to different people, people he'd never heard of, never heard Kitty speak about. He could think of only one reason why she'd have so many purses...His next search revealed a large clump of items wrapped up in a headscarf, which he tipped out onto the bed. A shower of gold and silver cascaded onto the floor; rings, watches, bracelets, none of which he knew for a fact belonged to her.

"Merlin's beard," he muttered to himself, throwing the scarf on top of them as if to hide them from his mind.

Desperately he delved back into the bag, there had to be another explanation for all of this, there had to be something in here.

And there was.

His frantic search revealed it's most shocking find yet, a small plastic bag, which he drew out and held at eye level, studying it in horror. Inside it was a fair sized amount of white powder which looked to Harry like sherbert but which he instinctively knew was something much, much worse. As he sat staring at the bag he felt like his world had once again become seriously unbalanced, as if the carpet had been pulled out from under his feet and he'd gone crashing to the ground. He just couldn't believe what he was seeing...what this meant...

He suddenly felt very sick and grabbed the handful of jewellery, throwing it into the bag angrily.

Clink.

There was the sound of metal on metal that made Harry pause in his furious repack on the bag. Curiously he dropped the wallets that had been in his hand to the floor and reached into the bag one last time. This time he found something he recognised instantly from the shape and the weight and didn't even need to withdraw it from the bag. He dropped it almost as soon as he touched it, scrambling backwards slightly so he was free of the bag, which sat there quite innocently, completely unaware of what horrors it was containing.

He sat staring at the bag, breathing heavily as he pictured the gun just lying there.

"What are you doing Kitty?" he whispered aloud in a horror-filled voice.

He didn't know how long he sat there, just staring at the contents of her bag that were strewn around his feet, holding his head in his hands. He thought of Kitty, so obsessed with movies - 'a thief' his mind whispered, party animal - 'a drug addict' he countered, she wanted to be with him...'she has a gun'.

His head was too messed up to think and he began to throw everything back into the bag as he'd found it, desperate to get it out of his line of sight, as if doing this would make it somehow magically

disappear. He put the bag back where he'd found it, recalled the Spy Snitch and stood up. What was he supposed to do now? What do people usually do when they find out the person they thought they trusted above all else had been lying to them ever since they'd met?

He couldn't think of a single thing and instead walked over to her sleeping back and sat onto it, staring ahead at the wall blankly as the light faded. Unfocussed eyes busy watching the memory of the contents of Kitty's bag.

The money, the stolen jewellery, the drugs, the gun...

Donna was right.

She was right all along.

Kitty pushed the door into her bedroom open, surprised to find it pitch black inside. She felt along the wall for the small light switch, flicking it and finding herself momentarily blinded by the sheer brightness of the bulbs. She fiddled with the dimmer until she could see without her eyes watering and dumped her coat on the floor. She began to unbutton her shirt and she turned around to see if the curtains open when she spotted Harry, sitting on her bed.

She gave a yelp and stumbled backwards, causing him to jump slightly.

"Je-sus Christ Harry!" she spluttered, hand clutching her chest, "you scared the shit out of me! What the hell are you doing sitting in the dark?"

"Just thinking," he said, a hand resting over his scar as he stared at her.

"That's bad for you, you know," she said with something of a nervous trill in her laugh, "god, you scared me man..."

"Sorry."



She tutted and turned away from him, continuing to unbutton her shirt again.

“Where were you all evening?” he asked her and she found herself slightly frowning at the tone, it sounded slightly out of place.

“I was just meeting an old friend,” she said over her shoulder, “just trying to find out our next port of call...just on our way out of here.”

“Right,” he said flatly and again Kitty’s ears pricked up.

Was it just her or did that sound more like a challenge than an agreement?

She gave herself a mental shrug –was she getting paranoid or what?

“And I told Donna we’re leaving,” she informed him, pulling off her shirt and throwing it onto the floor, “So that’s all sorted. I can’t quite believe we’ll be leaving here now...”

Harry didn’t say anything for a moment.

“Was Donna sad to see us go?”

“I think so, though she’s probably glad to have her flat back. Said we’d be welcome back anytime though,” Kitty told him over her shoulder.

“Really?”

Kitty frowned slightly at his tone.

“What?” she asked in puzzlement, turning around to face him, second shirt in hand.

He was staring at her in the most peculiar, unnerving manner possible and she suddenly felt off guard. She stared him in the eye for a great deal longer than was necessary or comfortable before he looked away and shrugged.

“Are you ok Harry?” she asked finally, pulling her shirt on.

“That is an interesting question,” he said running a hand through his hair before resting his fingertips on his scar.

She seen him do it a few times before and suddenly explained everything, his odd behaviour and weird tones.

“Did you have another nightmare?” she asked, kneeling down in front of him anxiously.

It took him a few moments to answer this and when he did, it was with a hollow tone to his words.

“You could definitely call it a nightmare.”

“You need to stop dwelling on stuff so much,” she said, staring into his eyes worriedly, “you’re gonna make yourself sick.”

“I feel sick already,” he replied.

She frowned even more and reached up and brushed his blonde hair away from his forehead. She repeated the motion a few times, hoping it’d take his mind off things but she was worried to see that he was still staring at the floor with the same expression on his face. With a sigh she shuffled forward until she was sitting on his lap and facing him, forcibly tilting his face up so she could see him properly.

“Tell me what it was about,” she suggested, “maybe it’d help?”

He was refusing to meet her gaze however and she frowned as she could practically see the cogs turning in his head, he was majorly worked up about something.

“Come on Harry,” she pleaded slightly, “I don’t like seeing you like this. Tell me...”

“I can’t,” he finally told her.

“Can’t?” she asked, leaning back slightly so she could better see him, “you can’t tell me?”

“No, I can’t.”

“Why not?” she exclaimed, looking hurt.

“Because it’s about you!” he burst out and for a moment she saw real anger in his eyes.

She looked taken aback and for a moment could say nothing at all.

“What about me?” she demanded in a neutral voice.

“I-,” he began, before thinking about it for a moment and starting again, “I just feel like something’s wrong.”

“What with?” she asked him in confusion, “With me?”

He continued to rub his scar for sometime and she shuffled off his lap, still staring at him.

“Sort of,” he said awkwardly, looking up into her eyes and she was surprised to see he didn’t have his contacts in.

“What?” she demanded, trying to cover the hurt in her voice, “If you’re gonna say something like that you better tell me your reason.”

He nodded heavily, looking like he was trying to find his words.

“It’s just, we can be honest with each other can’t we?” he asked her, “We can tell each other our secrets can’t we?”

“Yeah,” she said, “of course.”

“Then why don’t you?”

She sat back on the floor now, surprised by his question. She suddenly understood what was wrong with him, he'd found something out about her...

"What did she say to you?" demanded Kitty suddenly, looking angry.

"Who?" Harry asked, obviously not expecting this answer.

"Donna," she said, feeling the anger rising more now as she thought about it, "what did she tell you?"

Harry shook his head, looking as if his worst fears had been confirmed and she'd proved him exactly right.

"It doesn't matter," he said stiffly.

"Don't you dare say that!" she said angrily.

"It's nothing to do with her!" Harry replied, equally as forcefully.

"Yeah right," she scoffed.

"Yeah right!" he retorted, "She's been trying to break us up since the day I got here but I never let her get to me..."

"So why's it different now?" she demanded.

"Because now you're lying to me!" he yelled back.

She looked taken aback for a moment and was silent for a good few more seconds before she managed to stutter her mouth into gear.

"I don't lie to you Harry," she said in a low, hurt voice.

"Every time you open your mouth you lie Kitty!" he snapped in frustration, causing her to reel back once again.

"That's not fair!" she whispered, "How can you say that?"

Harry climbed to his feet in one swift moment and walked passed her, bending down and picking up her rucksack. He turned around and merely held it out for her to look at, staring at her intently.

“I know,” he stated.

Kitty stared at the bag for a long time, expression in her eyes akin to a rabbit caught in the headlights. He could almost see the cogs in her head turning, trying to figure out how to play this.

“Now tell me you don’t lie to me.”

“I don’t lie to you,” she whispered instantly.

“Kitty!” he exclaimed, almost incredulously, before opening her bag.

“Don’t!” she tried, but he was already pulling the bundle of clothes from the top.

He came across the money first, brandishing it at her expectantly.

“You know I stole that off my stepdad,” she said anxiously, “you saw me!”

“You told me you stole £200,” he stated, “where did the other £400 come from?”

“...My wages, I picked them up yesterday...”

“STOP LYING!” he yelled, before stopping himself and breathing heavily, “You’ve worked there less than a week, for 8 hours a day and you earn £3.50 an hour! That’s £140! So where’s it all coming from?”

She stared at the floor and Harry just dropped the money on the floor and pulled out the next offending item. He brandished the stolen wallets at her and he waited for her to speak.

“I was just...trying to get money,” Kitty explained hesitantly, “now we need to move on...we could get a room somewhere...”

Harry shook his head, pulling out a handful of gold chains.

“We need the money Harry,” she tried again, “for a room...”

“All those afternoons spent wandering around town Kitty,” he whispered accusingly, “all that time I thought you just enjoyed spending time with me? You were just working weren’t you, pickpocketing? Was I just your alibi or something?”

She shook her head slowly, whispering, “No Harry...you weren’t...but we need the money...”

He delving hand curled around what scared him most from her bag, more than the gun, more than the lies...a small bag of white powder. When he pulled it out Kitty flinched terribly, looking as if she’d been waiting and dreading this moment most of all.

“Now explain this to me.”

“We need the money-” she began in a small voice.

“I don’t care about having money Kitty!” he exploded, “I rather be on the streets with a few knuts in my pocket than find this here!”

She shifted from foot to foot, speechless for the first time since he’d met her.

“Is it yours?” he demanded angrily.

“Yes,” she said finally, jaw set firmly.

He gave an incredulous laugh and dropped her backpack to the floor as he looked from the small plastic bag to her.

“Do you take it?” he asked, not even wanting to know the answer, “No wait, I already know the answer to that one - that night you came

home so late, when I thought you were dead. You weren't drunk at all were you?"

She stared at the floor.

"You must all have been laughing at me, right? Stupid Harry, can't even recognise when his girlfriends stoned out of her mind - thinking she's drunk! Donna and Greg knew right away didn't they?" he asked, shaking with anger now, "You thought that was the reason I left for that whole day didn't you? Bet you were dead chuffed when you realised I only thought you were drunk - promising to quit drinking - god, how could I be so stupid?"

"It's not like that Harry! I was selling it," she replied, completely avoiding his question, "I was selling it to those guys...all of it! I promise!"

"Why?" he asked, scandalised.

"Money Harry, why do you think?" she said angrily, "for fun? Because I'm a bit bored and fancy wandering around council estates and hanging on street corners?"

"Is that where you've been disappearing to every day?" he shouted back, unable to comprehend her, "Selling drugs!"

"No! I've been making sure that we can survive!" she retorted loudly, "you may not give a damn about money Harry, but I don't want to carry on living my life not knowing when the next pounds coming from! I'm helping us!"

"You're not helping us," he replied in a low voice, "how is that helping us?"

"By getting us food! And somewhere to stay!" she told him, blue eyes imploring him to understand.

“Right...right...” he laughed disbelievingly, “so tell me this, if you were selling all of it to those guys - then why have you still got this in your bag?”

She looked as if the question came right out of the blue, as if she hadn't even realised herself.

“I...” she began hesitantly, “it's in case we run into trouble later...quick money...It's just...safety,”

He stared at her for a long moment, unable to fathom what she was saying.

“Is this for safety?” he said finally, pulling something out of the bag.

Kitty stared at the gun in Harry's shaking hand.

“Yes,” she whispered.

He gave an incredulous laugh, and Kitty looked from him to the gun.

“We need protecting...” she said in a half-angry, half-terrified, “You need protecting...”

“Believe me when I say this isn't going to help,” Harry laughed nastily and she glared at the floor.

“I was only trying to help!”

Harry couldn't believe what he was hearing.

“Why didn't you just tell me?” he demanded gesturing wildly with the gun.

“Don't threaten me with that thing,” she said harshly, batting his hand away.

He looked at her in surprise for a second.



“What, you think I’m going to hurt you?” he asked incredulously, feeling more taken aback than he was showing.

“Don’t threaten me!” she repeated, flinching.

“Stop saying that!” Harry growled angrily, throwing the gun to the floor, “I’m not one of your psycho relatives or boyfriends ok! Stop acting like I’m about to beat you up! I’m just trying to talk to you!”

Kitty glared at the floor mutinously and Harry took a shaking breath in, trying to figure out what he was trying to say, what he wanted her to do.

“Fine,” she said into the silence, wrapping her arms around her knees, “talk.”

Harry glared at her angrily, she was making it seem as if he was overreacting, as if he were getting angry at her unreasonably. He felt a sense of despair welling up within him, of all his petty arguments with her, he’d always known that everything would eventually be ok, but now...

“You don’t even understand what I’m feeling do you?” he asked her quietly.

“Oh no. I understand perfectly Harry,” she sneered, climbing to her feet, “you’re just pissed off at me because-”

“I’m not just pissed off at you!” exclaimed Harry, almost hurt by her low opinion, “I feel like I don’t even know you! That you don’t even trust me!”

She looked up at him swiftly, anger in her eyes.

“You know that’s not true,” she hissed at him, “I’ve proven that I trust you!”

“Then why didn’t you tell me about all this!” he asked, gesturing to the various items littered about them.

“Because...” she began, eyes darting from side to side like a caged animal.

“Why?” he asked again, louder.

“Because,” she stated, “because I didn’t want to.”

He gave another hollow laugh and with a contemptuous look she stared at the floor, arms wrapped protectively around her waist.

“Why?” he repeated.

“I just told you why!”

“And that’s supposed to be good enough?” he demanded of her.

“It should be!” she shouted at him suddenly, almost taking him by surprise, “you’ve always said you didn’t care about what I’ve done in my life because it didn’t matter!”

“It doesn’t!” he exclaimed.

“Then why are you biting my fucking head off!” she yelled, throwing her arms up.

“You know what? I’m biting your fucking head off because I don’t really care if you’re stealing or dealing drugs or whatever! I don’t like it, but you know what - I Don’t Care! It’s stupid and it’s dangerous but I don’t care! All I care about is the fact that you didn’t even trust me enough to tell me! That you think I’m overreacting! That you don’t care enough about me to give me a straight answer! That you snuck about behind my back! That you lied to me every single day! That you made me a promise, a promise that you knew you’d break! I mean, what’s the point!”

“What’s the point?” she repeated flatly, “Is this you breaking up with me or something?”

“No!” he shouted at her furiously, unable to understand why she was behaving like this, “why aren’t you listening to me!”

“I am,” she said in the same dull voice, “but I know where this is going.”

“Where?” he demanded quickly.

“You know where.”

“Do you want me to break up with you - is that it?” he demanded incredulously, “Will that make you feel better? Well news flash Kitty! I’m not going to make this easy for you! You can’t just run away because things have got hard!”

She looked at him for a long, hard minute before coming to some sort of decision.

“Right...Fine...So what happens now Harry?” she demanded in quiet anger, balled fists shaking.

“I just wanted you to be honest with me!” he told her trying to keep his voice low.

“What’s the point!” she cried, suddenly gesticulating wildly, “You’ve figured it all out already, you’ve accused me already and you’ve already made up your mind, haven’t you!”

“No!” he shouted back, also rising to his feet, “I just want to hear you say it, for you to tell me! To explain!”

“Why!” she demanded in an equally loud voice, “you already know what I’m going to say! Are you hoping I’m going to prove you wrong? That you got it wrong and I’ll turn out to be the perfect girl you want?”

“No,” he repeated, “I just want you to be honest! To be yourself! That’s all!”

“This is me!” she shouted loudly, “I don’t know who you think I am, but I can’t be anything other than what I am! And you obviously can’t handle that!”

“I can,” he said emphatically, “what I can’t handle is sitting here thinking that you don’t even give a shit about me! That you don’t trust me enough to explain who you are!-”

“How can you even say that? After everything I’ve done for you, after everything I’ve shared with you?” she cried, “I’ve told you things I’ve never even told another soul about, and what’s it all for, for you to turn around one day and throw it all back in my face?”

“I’m not doing that Kitty!” he said in exasperation, “Stop being so vindictive!”

“-What, you don’t like who I am?” she interjected angrily, spreading her arms wide, “well hello Harry, this is me ok? Take it or leave it!”

“That is not who you are,” he said furiously, jabbing a finger towards the items scattered across the floor.

“How the fuck do you know!” she yelled even louder, seemingly incensed by his apparent knowledge of her, “This is me ok? This is me one hundred per fucking cent! I’m not gonna pretend I’m some little princess just because you can’t handle the fact that-”

“I can handle who you are!” cut in Harry, stepping up close to her and hissing through gritted teeth, “I’ve just got bigger things to be worrying about right now than how you’re fucking your life up!”

Kitty reeled back as if she’d just been slapped and whatever colour had been in her face seemed to drain away instantly. She looked furious, but Harry was too angry himself now to care.

“I don’t want you to be some little princess ok? I just want you to be you, the you who I’ve known-”

“I still am!” she yelled furiously, shoving him hard in the chest.

Harry stumbled over backwards and knocked into the bedroom door. He looked over at her incredulously to see her face contorted with anger, deathly white save for angry splotches of red on her cheeks.

“What!” she demanded hoarsely, “I’m not the person you knew remember! Why are you surprised!”

“What is wrong with you?” he asked in a furious, shaking voice, “Have you gone insane or something?”

“Smack me one if it’ll make you feel any better!” she yelled, shoving him roughly again, “Knock some sense into me then! That’s what’s you’re good at - hurting people!”

Harry stumbled backwards once more, but not from her angry shove, but from shock at the angry tirade that was pouring out of her mouth. He stared at her open-mouthed as her furious words rang in his ears.

“I’m not going to hurt you,” he said blankly.

“Too fucking late!”

Without another word she turned on her heel, picked up her bag and coat and stormed out of the room. He turned to watch her go as if in a trance, before starting forwards suddenly after her.

“KITTY!” he shouted as she stormed down the corridor.

“Fuck off Harry!” she screeched back at him, pulling her jacket on.

“NO! Just listen!” he demanded, grabbing her elbow as she reached the front door.

She twisted out of his grip easily and gave him another hard shove in the chest which he blocked with his arms this time. She tried again with a furious yell and again Harry blocked, starting a furious scuffle as he, no matter how angry he was, tried not to hurt her. Kitty

however seemed to have turned completely wild in her anger and it took a moment for Harry to realise he was almost scared of her.

“Stop it!” he told her pleadingly, grabbing her wrists as her fingernails gouged a deep cut along his cheek.

“Let me go!” she practically screamed.

“Kitty, please stop!” he demanded fearfully.

“You stop!” she yelled back, “LET ME GO!”

She managed to wrench out of his grip and Harry, panicked now, saw her drawing back her fist, making to hit him.

“DON’T!” he commanded suddenly.

It happened so quickly he didn’t even see what happened, one moment her fist was coming towards him, the next she had stumbled backwards, cradling her hand. For a second all that could be heard was their heavy breathing as Kitty flexed her fingers experimentally watching them with wide eyes.

“What did you just do to me?” she whispered, looking up at him.

Harry knew that he’d unintentionally cast some kind of protection spell and he could do nothing, say nothing but stare back at Kitty as she massaged her hand, eyes still wide with shock and confusion.

“What did you do?” she demanded in a high pitched voice.

“Nothing,” was all he could say, holding up his hands.

“You’d never hurt me, right Harry?” she demanded with a horrible laugh, backing away from him now, “I thought you were supposed by different Harry! I thought you were supposed to be the good guy! YOU’RE JUST LIKE THE REST OF THEM!”

“I didn’t touch you!”

Kitty obviously couldn’t figure out what had happened. She knew Harry had not touched her, but she also knew that something had happened to her...something painful. Her angry eyes met his again, searching for some kind of answer. She seemed to have decided whatever had happened was in her own mind because she seemed to forget the uncertainty and fear and glared at him once more.

“Don’t go!” he demanded quickly before she became too angry again, “Will you just listen to me?”

She gave a humourless laugh and spun away from him, grabbing the door handle and wrenching it open. He shot out an arm to keep it closed.

“I’ve had enough of listening to you!” she hissed, “Helping you, being with you! Glad to know you give a shit!”

“Merlin’s sake!” he burst out unintentionally, “why is it so hard for you to just be straight with me!”

“Because I’m a lying, cheating, thieving, druggie according to you,” she pointed out with a poison filled voice, “scum right?”

“I didn’t say that!” he countered furiously - how had she turned this around so that she was the one being hard-done-by?

“But you’re thinking it you bastard!” she said, staring at him hard, “I can see it in your goddamn eyes!”

“You can’t see anything in my eyes Kitty!” he scoffed at her melodrama.

A look of deepest hurt flashed across her face at this and even in his fury he felt this may have crossed the line. Kitty pulled her bag towards her and stepped out the door in silence.

“Kitty, wait,” he began with a sigh moving forwards.

The slap came out of nowhere and stung his cheek terribly, noise echoing around the small hall.

“Go back to where you came from Harry,” she said in a low, dangerous voice, “I’m sure you’ve had fun, being away with your bit of rough right? But you don’t belong here, and I don’t deserve to be here with you.”

She wrenched the door open and he slammed a hand into it again, holding it shut.

“Don’t you dare do this now,” he warned her, “don’t you dare leave.”

“You gonna stop me?” she asked him dangerously, “I think you’re forgetting that this is your fault!”

“I’m not the one lying,” he told her furiously.

“You want to talk about secrets Harry?” she demanded wildly, “Then why don’t you tell me all yours! Tell me why you’re really on the run! Tell me why Sirius is dead, why your parents died! Why you’ve never told me anything about your life! Your friends! Why you thinking my brother’s murder is your fault! Why you think someone’s after me! What the things you mutter in your sleep mean? Why you won’t let me look in your bag!”

She paused, breathing heavily, a positively murderous look in her eye.

“Have a look if you want! I’m sure you won’t find a gun, a bag of coke and over half a grand in dirty money!” he hissed back recklessly.

“Oh right! Nice to know what you really think at last!” she practically spat, “That must be the first truthful thing you’ve said to me in a long while Harry Potter! I notice you’re not leaping to explain the rest of the shit you’re up to!”

He glared right back at her.



“So it’s ok for you to have secrets and lie to me but when I do it, to help us, you decide that your fucking better than me?” she demanded, bordering on hysterical now, “Well here you go, my fucking explanation in one paragraph! I smoke, I drink and yes, I take drugs! I stole all my stepfathers gear when we left! I meet up with random guys and sell it to them so I’d have to some money so you wouldn’t leave me! And guess what, the other day I broke a guys arm because he tried to pull a fast one! I ran away from here last time because my best friend died because of me! And I took that gun so I could kill anyone who tried to even get near us!”

“So there you go, happy now?” she demanded furiously, chest heaving, “I really am as bad as Donna said. I really am as bad as you were scared I was! I really am not who you thought I was. And who knows, maybe I was using you the whole time! But I suppose you’ll never know, will you?”

She stormed out, door slamming in his face with a force that made the letterbox clatter angrily.

He wrenched it open to see her storming down the corridor.

“KITTY!”

She turned around, still walking backwards as she watched him.

“STOP RUNNING AWAY!” he yelled at her retreating back.

She had the strangest smile on her furious face and she gave a horrible laugh.

“In case you hadn’t realised, this is me breaking up with you Harry!” she exclaimed exuberantly, spreading her arms wide.

“FINE!” he shouted back at her, incensed beyond words now, “GO! Glad I meant so much to you!”

She gave another laugh and turned around, approaching the stairwell.

“Ah, come on Harry!” she tossed back over her shoulder just before she disappeared from his life, “you got a goodbye!”  
Phew wipes sweat off brow>, what do you think then?

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AN/ Ok, so this is my favourite chapter of them all and it's a strange choice I know, but this last scene was my first idea for the whole story! So everything was written around it sort of thing! The angst factor may also be explained by the disaster of a week I've had with essay deadlines, exams and dissertation pressure so here's my release!

Big question in terms of this last scene is though - who do you blame?

P.S. To those that asked, i am in fact English (and from Wolverhampton obviously) Up the Wolves!

AND P.P.S - This isn't the end of the story! Keep on a-waiting!

## Chapter Seventeen

I wish I was someone else,  
I'm confused, I'm afraid,  
I hate the loneliness,  
And there's nowhere to run to,  
Nothing makes any sense,  
But I still try my hardest.

Kitty walked into the nearest off-license, marched over to the spirits section, picked up the biggest bottle of vodka she could find and took it to the counter. The man standing next to the till looked at her stonily for a moment and Kitty stared right back, her expression hard and cold. He looked up her down for another long moment.

“You got any ID?” he drawled out, voice malicious.

Kitty silently pulled out a small plastic card from her wallet and slapped it on the counter. He picked it up, looked from the picture on it to her several times.

“What’s your date of birth then?”

“13th July 1979.”

He merely shook his head slightly, obviously in disbelief, but moments later he merely said.

“That’ll be £9.89.”

Kitty handed over the money mutely, snatching back the change and taking the bag with the drink in and marching back out of the shop again.

It was 2 a.m., the streets were practically deserted and it was pouring with rain. Rolls of thunder could be heard in the distance, mingling with the sound of far off cars racing and the motorway so that a steady thrum filled Kitty’s head. That seemed all that there was space

for, she seemed to have lost the ability to process information, she couldn't even begin to think of what had happened to her that day.

She walked a familiar path to her destination, teeth chattering as the icy rain slid down her back, at some point she'd think about putting her coat on, at some point she'd wake up, back in bed, safe and sound.

She gave a snort, safe and sound?

She gripped the bottle of vodka tightly, trying to stop her hands shaking - was that because of the cold? Or the anger? The fury? The pain?

She must have been walking in a daze because moments later she arrived outside the rusting iron gates of her destination. Where had that half an hour walk just gone?

She tried the gates, unsurprisingly they were locked and she stared at them for a moment, feeling slightly let down. However after a moment she rammed the bottle into her bag, slung it over her shoulder and placed her hand on the bars. She pulled herself up easily, climbing up the curves and swirls of metal, swinging a leg over the top before jumping off, landing agilely on the ground.

She strode forwards, feet sinking into the spongy grass, now even more sticky from the rain. Dark shadows of stones rising from the ground seemed to close in around her and she felt like she'd entered another world. This one seemed so much more real than the one she'd just left, now her mind was starting to work again, she could remember what she was supposed to be thinking, how she should be feeling.

She stumbled suddenly, staggering forwards and looking back to see she tripped over a fresh mound of earth, tripping over the plastic wrapped flowers. She ignored them, found the right row and began to walk along. She tapped each headstone as she walked past, counting under her breath. Eventually she found number 37 and she stood stock still, hand still resting on it.

There was another roll of thunder and Kitty looked up, watching the rain falling into her face for some time before she walked around the front of it. She crouched down and pulled out her lighter. She flicked it several times before it spluttered to life, hissing in the rain, as she stared at the words carved into it.

Here lies,

Sarah Elizabeth Earl,

Born: 13th July 1962

Died: 24th December 1995

Aged 34 years

The Lord Giveth, and the Lord Taketh Away

The flame spluttered again and suddenly died but Kitty could still see the words, she hadn't even needed to use the lighter, she already knew what it said.

"Hi mom," she said, sitting down on top of the grave and staring at the headstone still, "still here I see."

She gave a nasty laugh and shook her head and idly poked around in the dirt for some time. Her mind was suddenly rushing with thoughts and feelings now and she wasn't sure how she was supposed to have them all at once, it didn't seem right - it hurt too much.

"Two years mom," she muttered, staring at the date of the grave now, "Happy 36th."

Kitty pulled her bag off her back and dropped it in front of her. It was slick with rain now, which had seeped in through the thin fabric so that when she flipped it open she could see all her clothes were soaked through.

"I got you a present," she said shortly.

She pulled out the vodka bottle from the carrier bag and unscrewed the cap.

“You’re favourite,” she said scornfully before upending it.

The spirit sloshed out of the bottle, splattering the already muddy grave as she watched it silently. She liked the glugging sound it made.

Eventually the last trickle left the bottle and Kitty pulled the glass bottle towards her as she glared at the grave stone now.

“So how’s it going for you?” she demanded, “Cosy in there is it? No worries, eh?”

There was a sudden flash of lightning that lit up the engraved words for a moment, before dying away and being followed quickly by another roll of thunder.

“Is that your way of saying fuck you, mom?” she asked, hands shaking terribly, “Well thanks a bunch!”

She stared at the stone in silence, trying very hard to stop her mind from trying to recall what had just happened with Harry. But the more she tried not to think of it the worse it became and the furious tears began to splash down her cheeks.

“Like mother like daughter, mom!” she began to sob, “This is all your fault! You broke me!”

She dropped the vodka bottle onto the sodden grass and tried to stem the tears which refused to stop. The grief and the fury was too strong, too much for her to be able to cope with.

“Even Harry mom!” she spluttered, “Even Harry!”

As if it would make her feel better, she lashed out at the stone, kicking it and slapping it as she cried out angrily, not stopping until her hands stung and her chest ached in the freezing cold air. She

bent down until her forehead touched the ground in defeat and tried to stop the tears, she wouldn't cry for him, she wasn't sorry she'd left, she wasn't, she wasn't...

Finally her breathing calmed down and the tears stopped and she did nothing but continue to stare at the ground, rain trickling down her neck, causing her to shake uncontrollably.

And then slowly she pushed herself up, still staring at the ground, before digging her fingernails into it and ripping up the turf. She leant forwards, breathing heavily as she continued to dig until she had a small, deep hole there. She pulled her bag towards and pulled out everything - the wallets, the jewellery, the drugs...

She dropped them all into the hole.

"Everything you ever taught me mom!" she whispered furiously, "You can have it all back! I don't want it anymore! I don't need you anymore!"

She scabbled at the dirt, packing it in tightly before jumping up and away from the grave. She gave it one last glare, before yanking up her back and stumbling away.

It was two days since Tonks had had any contact with either the magical or muggle world and she was desperate to find out what had happened – had Harry been found and if not, had progress been made. Had Dumbledore figured out what to do if they hadn't, what was going on at the ministry? How was her mother? Had she earned enough to repay this weeks Goblin loan?

You just want to see Remus a small voice in her head whispered to her.

That's right, I do, she thought glumly, I want nothing more than to see him – she needed something to make her feel something other than this uselessness, the depression brought on by prolonged contact to the Dementors vibes. Even if it was hurt and ache of seeing him looking at her as if she were one of his pupils, at least that would be something...

Her head was reeling and she reached out a shaky hand and steadied herself on the edge of the pier. After a few minutes the dizzy spell cleared away and she could make her silent, stumbling progression into the small village of Dunharrow. When she reached the floo station she didn't even bother looking into the mirror to check her appearance, all she wanted now was to get back...

Harry was sat huddled up on the floor, staring unseeingly ahead as the waves of pain and anger crashed around him. The piercing pain in his scar wasn't even registering with him at that moment in time, all he could think about Kitty.

Kitty lying, Kitty shouting, Kitty running away...

He gritted his teeth, shifting his gaze to his wand which he had been toying with for the past few hours. He studied it as if it was the most interesting thing in the world - it needed polishing he thought vaguely, he'd never taken particularly good care of it...

He held it out in front of him, feeling the reassuring weight in his wand arm, funny he thought, this is all that stands between me and Voldemort, a couple of inches of wood and phoenix feather. This was all he needed, he didn't need the Order's protection, he didn't need Snape's Occlumency, he didn't need Kitty...

He turned the wand upon himself so that it brushed his messy blonde hair.

"Redeo!" he whispered.

There was small flash of light and moments later he pulled down a lock of fringe and saw that it was black once more. In some way this made him feel slightly better and he went back to turning his wand between his fingers.

Staring at the wall unseeingly as he thought about how lucky he was that he'd found out about Kitty sooner rather than later and that he was back to being on his own.

His stomach churned fiercely.



Trouble was, he didn't believe a word of it.

Remus and Bill were bent over a scrap of parchment, deep in discussion when Tonks arrived back at Grimauld Place. It was approaching dusk and she stumbled into the room, steadying herself on the kitchen table and taking a few shaky breaths, as if trying to fight back a wave of sickness.

"Tonks!" Remus said in surprise, rushing forwards.

"Wotcher guys," she said, still bent over slightly as she tried to calm down her churning stomach.

"At last! Where have you been?" asked Bill quickly.

"Are you alright?" asked Remus anxiously, placing a worried hand on her bent back.

"Fine," she said firmly, standing up straight and attempting to give them a comforting grin.

Remus stared at her in shock, she looked terrible. There were heavy black rings around her eyes, which looked bloodshot and her skin looked sallow and pale as if she were in the midst of a sickness.

"You look awful Tonks," said Bill seriously, also apparently as shocked as Remus was by her appearance.

"Well there's a greeting," she said weakly, running a slightly trembling hand through her lank, long pink hair, "you're a doll too."

"Don't joke," he said worriedly, "what's happened?"

"Nothing," she told them, dropping her bag to the floor with a thunk, "my shifts over, I'm free – is there any coffee about?"

"I'll get you some," he said instantly and darted over to the hob.

“Come and sit down,” said Remus, studying her closely, she looked exhausted.

She allowed herself to be led to one of the chairs and fell down into it heavily. She turned her heavy lidded eyes towards him and gave a laconic sort of smile.

“What’s the bacon?” she asked, “I take it you haven’t found him?”

“No, but we’ve had an interesting lead, I’ll tell you everything in a minute, first lets start with you,” he said, noting her lids kept drooping before being forced open, “I thought you said no more than one shift a day?”

“Yeah well, I-” she began awkwardly before Bill appeared with the coffee, “oh magic – you don’t know how much this is going to help.”

“You really don’t look too well Tonks,” he said, sitting down opposite them, “maybe we should call out a Healer-”

“Don’t be stupid,” she scoffed instantly, “I’m perfectly ok.”

“No offence, but you look like me after a couple of heavy nights,” Remus told her, feeling like he knew how tired she must have been.

“Must be bad then,” she joked, “seriously guys I’m fine, nothing a comfy sofa, cup of coffee and you filling me in on news wouldn’t help.”

“Let’s go in the lounge then,” said Bill, leaving no time for her to protest, gathering her mug and urging Remus to get her up.

“I’m not an invalid you know,” she told them as they guided her towards the lounge, “and I do know the way.”

“Just shut up and make me happy, ok little sis?” Bill asked her despairingly.

She merely rolled her eyes as she sank into the two-seater sofa, feeling instantly tired by the comfort of the seats. Bill sat opposite her and Remus walked back into the kitchen to get the files, deep in thought. It's getting worse, he realised, her reaction to the prison was more severe every time she came back – how long was it going to be before she couldn't walk out, never came back?

He was going to speak to Kingsley about it when he arrived, it wasn't like it was necessary, her working there hadn't led to them finding that much useful stuff had it? It's not like the prisoners were confiding in the guards about their plans was it? He wasn't going to let her go to that place anymore, not for Moody, not for information, not for the Order - not even for Sirius.

On impulse he headed over to the dresser and pulled out a mug, reaching into his pocket and pulled out the bar of chocolate he'd attempted to give her the other day and broke it up into pieces. Waving his wand over the mug it instantly slumped into a thick liquid and he stirred in a little milk. When he walked back into the lounge he found Tonks leaning against the arm of her chair heavily as she tried to listen to Bill. Whether by design or not, there was only one seat left, the sofa Tonks was on and after a moments indecision he sat down in it and handed her the mug wordlessly.

"Mmm, looks good," she said, eyeing the chocolate with ill-disguised hunger.

She took a deep swig and Remus recognised the usual reaction of someone suffering from Dementor sickness, you could almost see the goodness travelling around her body. She closed her eyes gratefully and continued to drink it rather quickly, so would I he thought, if I was suffering like she was obviously was.

A moment later she was placing it on the floor, looking a little better already, her skin wasn't quite so waxen and yellow anymore.

"So tell me what's happening with Harry?" she asked them sleepily, grabbing a pillow and leaning against it heavily.

“He’s been using magic tonight,” Bill began, and in unison they all reached into their robes and pulled out their pieces of parchment.

Sure enough, under today’s date there were already two spells.

“Protego and Redeo?” Tonks asked in confusion, “that’s strange...”

“I know,” frowned Remus, “he obviously needs protecting from something, but that’s all we heard for a good few hours. His anti-location charms still working though, no place named, just spell and time.”

“It’s so irritating,” sighed Bill, “there’s nothing we can do! I just hope it was a bit of harmless magic.”

“Me too,” Remus worried, “unless he was attacked and doesn’t have his wand any more...”

“But then he used the redeo charm!” pointed out Tonks, “that’s just a simple cosmetic spell to return something to normal! My friends always used to use it on their make-up and hair and stuff!”

“Perhaps he’s used magic to hide his scar?” suggested Bill, “probably takes a lot of explaining, something like that.”

“Yeah, I suppose,” thought Tonks.

“Maybe he’s told Cathy about Magic?” wondered Remus, “Maybe he’s using magic on her?”

“Perhaps,” nodded Bill, “I guess we’re not going to know until we find him.”

“And how’s that going to happen?” Tonks said heavily, “We’re no closer now than the day he went missing.”

“Almost all of the Order are going to go to Wolverhampton tomorrow, search the city centre, make some inquiries - we’ve got a list of old school friends and places she lived, we’re starting there.”

“Really, that’s great, where first?” Tonks said, sitting up interestedly.

“Are you sure you’re well enough to come?” Bill asked, looking slightly worried.

“Shut it you,” dismissed Tonks, turning to Remus, “where first?”

“We’re going to try the last place she was living before she went missing, where her mother died, it’s a tower block near the city centre. According to that address book we got from her stepdads flat she had some friends there too - a girl called Donna Grace.”

“Wow, progress,” nodded Tonks in approval, “when are we going?”

“Tomorrow lunch time, I thought we could ask Dumbledore to join us?” he replied.

“Good idea,” Tonks replied, “he’ll be back tomorrow.”  
It was a horrible mistake.

It was all his fault.

He’d lost her...

Harry stared at the watch he’d laid out on the pillow next to his head, watching every single second that passed with a horrible gnawing feeling in his stomach. Kitty had been gone since 6 p.m., it was now 5 a.m., that was 11 hours she’d been missing...

He gave a sigh and turned over once again, pulling his covers over his head as he went through their argument once again – the more he’d thought about it, the more he’d come to realise that he’d made a monumentally huge mistake. He’d completely overreacted to what he’d found out, she was right, what difference did it make? He knew

her, even if he didn't know everything about her. He kept secrets from her too – huge secrets, secrets that made hers pale in comparison...

And now, Kitty was gone, she'd taken her bag, she'd taken her coat – she was the master of the quick disappearance...he'd never see her again. This was possibly the worst realisation, the worst feeling that Harry had known since Sirius died. The first thing that truly broke through the barrier of pain and grief. He missed Kitty as if she'd fallen through that veil as well.

He forgot all attempts of getting to sleep now, giving a groan and placing his hands over his face. He listened to the movements of the flat around him feeling the grief washing over him.

What was he going to do now...?

Kitty sat on the bench, slowly munching her way through a bag of over-cooked, over-priced greasy chips from the only remaining van that was still open at this time of the morning. It was cold, it was dark and she shaking, freezing cold and soaking wet. The storm was passing now, she could hear it receding into the distance.

After a moment she dropped the chips onto the bench and pulled her knees up to her chest. She wrapped her arms around her head and tried to stop what she was feeling.

She wasn't upset, she told herself.

She wasn't scared.

She wasn't heartbroken.

She gave a great shuddering intake of breath and she felt the grief washing over her.

What was she going to do now?

Harry had found everything out, he'd acted exactly as she'd feared he would, how everyone did. And there are no second chances she told herself, no new leaves to turn over. No new life. She'd been hours away from putting this mess of a life behind her, and she'd ruined it.

She lost Harry.

She lost the only thing worth living for.

She couldn't cope without him.

Giving a great sniff she jumped to her feet, swung her bag over her shoulders and set off purposely. She knew what she had to do now, the only thing she could do.

The thing she'd always been too scared to do, always clinging onto the other option. It was time to change, it was time to stop.

Remus noticed that her head kept drooping forwards, before jerking back up instantly, classic symptoms of someone who wants to sleep more than anything else in the world.

"Why don't you just get into one of our beds Tonks?" he asked her a while later, causing Bill to look up too.

"Not tired," she muttered, and he gave her a frown.

Bill looked over to him and gave a shrug – nothing you can do it clearly said. However, Tonks was obviously tired and she turned slightly to rest her head on the back of the sofa. A while later the sound of her even breathing filled the air and Bill watched her, giving a sigh.

"I don't know what she's doing," he told Remus worriedly.

"If she keeps this up she'll kill herself," he agreed, also watching her sleep.

"She doesn't even get any credit either," Bill said, shaking his head sadly.

"I'm going to talk to Moody and Kingsley about this," he said firmly, "she can't do it anymore."

Bill nodded in agreement and watched her for a few more seconds.

“We should get her into a bed,” he suddenly said decisively, “let her have a proper rest.”

Remus fully agreed and turned to Tonks, shaking her shoulder slightly, “Tonks, wake up...”

“Wha?” she mumbled, opening her eyes blearily.

“Let’s take you up to bed,” he said coaxingly.

“No, warm here,” she protested dazedly, “just need to stretch out...”

And with this she shuffled towards him, tucking her feet up onto the sofa and lying down, head resting in his lap. And then she was asleep again and he could do nothing but stare down at her blankly. He cast a surprised look over to Bill, who merely shrugged, small, knowing smile on his face.

“Best let her rest where she wants,” he said and went back to his notes.

Remus couldn’t help but stare back down at her, a strange thought stealing over him as he watched her sleep, comfy as anything curled up against him.

Time passed relatively quickly and Remus found himself settling into this unorthodox way of working soon enough, although he was slightly suspicious of Bill’s occasional glances towards them and his lingering smile.

“Coffee Remus?” asked Bill after a while, already up on his feet, mugs in hand.

“That’d be nice,” he agreed, placing his book down on the side and rubbing his eyes wearily.



When Bill had gone he looked down at Tonks, still deeply asleep, snuggled against him. He didn't know why, but it was strangely comforting, her being there. He couldn't put his finger exactly on why, but it just seemed...nice. Once again the odd thought presented itself in his mind and he watched her for some time, thinking it over.

He didn't know why, but he found himself reaching out and brushing the hair away from her face, still thinking. It didn't really make any sense this thought, it wasn't exactly logical and that's what he thrived on, logic and sense. It was Tonks who was trying to teach him other ways to view the world, seems it was working, he thought and smoothed her hair down again.

He noticed that her skin felt quite cold and frowning slightly and ran his fingers down her cheek – definitely cold, freezing in fact.

Just at that moment she made a muffled noise, unconsciously moving her cheek back into his hand. He froze for a moment, thinking she'd wake up and catch him, but she settled down almost instantly. Watching her do this, the odd thought developed into a feeling that stole over his entire body as he stared at her incredulously.

Could it be, he wondered, slowly pulling his hand away...

"Coffee's up!" came a voice from behind the door, shortly followed by Bill.

Remus looked up quickly, feeling impossibly guilty. However Bill didn't seem to have noticed anything, placing his mug on the table in front of him. Remus tried to shake the feeling and looked over to Bill, barely containing his emotions.

"I really ought to put her up to bed," he said steadily, "she's freezing."

"Ok," nodded Bill, already picking up his book, "need help?"

"No – there's no need," he assured him.

He began to slow task of extricating himself from underneath Tonks, who was dead to the world. Finally he managed to get off the sofa and he tried to stretch a little life into his muscles before bending down and scooping her up into his arms.

She was surprisingly light he noted as he trudged up the stairs, her head leaning against his chest, arm dangling down limp as a rag doll. Really light he realised towards the top of the stairs, he felt like he'd been able to carry her one armed if he wanted and he thought back to the few days before when everyone walked in on her getting changed.

She certainly was a slender girl anyway, but she'd been noticeably thinner than when he'd seen her at her friends house the other week in that bikini top. He wondered if she was more affected by the Dementors than she let on, that all her work was making her ill.

He tried to focus his mind as he reached the landing, heading towards the closest bed room, kicking the door open with an unseen foot and placing her gently down on the bed. He tried to arrange her so she looked a little more comfy, before deciding to take her boots off. As he slowly pulled apart the laces on her trademark purple boots he thought more about what he'd decided, that feeling, the feeling he'd been wondering about the past few months.

He'd been right.

Tonks muttered something incoherent and Remus quietly lowered the boots to the floor and pulled the quilt over her, tucking it in around her sleeping form. She must have been absolutely exhausted he realised, to not have woken up at all...

On impulse he reached out and smoothed the hair off her face, repeating the motion a few times more than was strictly necessary.

"Sweet dreams Tonks."

Yes, he was definitely right.

Harry still couldn't sleep. He was still staring at the clock face, watching the seconds tick past, secretly marvelling at how he could

still possibly be here, still be living when everything around him was crumbling once again.

He'd lost everything. Family, friends, Ron, Hermione, Sirius, Kitty...

Everyone leaves in the end, Kitty had told him once, and all along he'd known she'd been right. Everyone does leave in the end, and then one day you woke up and you realised that you were alone, that you would just run and hide your whole life, wait to be found...

Murder or be murdered.

And he couldn't do it alone.

He pressed the heels of his hands into his eyes and drew in a shaky breath. He needed to find Kitty. He had to apologise. He had to explain to her about magic, and Voldemort, about Sirius and his friends, about the Prophecy - about why he was so scared. He sat up decisively, he needed a plan, he needed to think about the best way to find her, to explain, to win back her trust...

A sudden noise from the hallway made him freeze mid-thought. It sounded like footsteps, lightly padding across the carpeted hallway and he sat in absolute silence, not even breathing as he drew his wand out. After a few moments of silence he heard the door creak open and there was a crack of light filling the room before the door closed again. He squinted in the gloom at the solitary figure, heart hammering madly in his chest - who was it? The Order, a Death Eater? Donna?

He couldn't unstick his tongue to speak and so the two waited, as if daring the other to go first. Then he heard a bag hit the floor, keys skitter onto the small table and the sound of a coat being dropped. Harry stared at the black figure, heart suddenly exploding into a mad flurry of hammering for a completely different reason, he recognised that sound...

"Kitty?" he asked, daring to hope...

There was a long silence, the longest Harry had every known in his life and he could feel his whole life stretching out along two completely different paths based on this one answer he was waiting for.

“Yeah,” whispered a voice in the gloom.

He almost whooped out loud in relief, it was her!

“Kitty?” he asked again, almost unable to believe it.

She didn’t reply but a moment later he heard her tiptoeing across the room towards him and a moment later, the edge of the bed dipped down slightly.

“I thought you’d left?” he whispered breathlessly, looking at the dark shape in front of him.

“Fancied some chips,” she said hoarsely, throwing something onto his lap.

There was a waft of the unmistakable smell of greasy food towards him and he looked across to her unsurely. He deposited the packet on the floor next to them.

“Kitty, I’m – I’m really sorry,” he said in a voice that suggested he couldn’t believe how stupid he’d been.

She didn’t say anything and he fancied he could see what he thought was a nod of the head in the dark.

“I really don’t care about it, any of it,” he tried again, “you didn’t have to explain...I was just being a...a...I’m so sorry.”

There was still silence and Harry bit his lip nervously, unsure of what to do or say next. The last time he’d seen her she had been so furious...perhaps she was just here to say everything she didn’t get a chance to before?

“I’m sorry?” he repeated, warily reaching out to lay a hand on her shoulder.

They were shaking and he frowned at her – was she laughing? At a time like this?

“Kitty?” he demanded swiftly.

All at once she gave a sniff and twisted around until she was facing him and lay down on the bed. He looked down at her incredulously – she was crying.

Through all their dramas, being beaten up by her dad, fighting with Donna, talking about her mum, he’d never once seen her shed a single tear and he thought he must have been mistaken. He squinted through the darkness and tried to assess the situation. Then he heard it, the unmistakable sound of somebody crying...

“Kitty?” he asked again quietly, shuffling over so he was lying down properly and could see her, “Are you ok?”

“Mmm-hmm,” she agreed unconvincingly, giving another quiet sniff.

His watch had fallen off the pillow onto the bed now, but the luminous dials was throwing a tiny amount of eerie green light onto her features and Harry could finally see the red eyes and the tear tracks down her face.

“Kitty...don’t...”

Feeling horribly guilty, he reached up and brushed away a tear off her cheek with his thumb slowly.

This seemed to make her more upset because she scrunched up her face and shuffled towards him until she’d buried her face against his chest. Wordlessly he wrapped his arms around her and waited for her tears subside, realising that she needed time first.

It was then he realised she was absolutely soaking wet and he realised the ominous rumblings he'd heard earlier were in fact an approaching storm. He could feel her desperately trying to brush her tears away and control her breathing. He almost smiled to himself, even at her lowest she hated to appear anything but in control.

"I'm so sorry Harry," she whispered in a tortured voice.

He didn't really know what to say and after a moment she gave a choked sob, whatever battle she was trying to wage on herself to stop showing how she felt, she seemed to be losing.

"I'm so, so sorry!" she sobbed, "I didn't mean it, I didn't! Not to hurt you! I'm so sorry! I'm so sor-"

"Kitty, don't," he cut in, wrapping his arms around her tightly, "ssshh..."

He stroked her hair in a calming motion as she fought to get her tears under control. Harry couldn't quite believe that this was his Kitty sitting in front of him, who was so strong, who never let anything get to her, who never let anyone know if she was hurting...He had the horrible feeling that he'd broken her...

The silence was almost killing him now, she was back but he had no idea what was going to happen now - so much had been said now, how could it be undone? How could things go back to the way they were when so much had happened? It wasn't as easy as it was to begin with, when he was planning to run away and she was this stranger that had a strange pull over him - now it was complicated.

"I'm fucking messed up Harry," came her muffled voice suddenly.

"What?" he frowned, feeling her slightly ragged breath on his shoulder where her face was buried.

"I'm messed up..." she repeated in a thick voice.

“No you’re not,” he replied, still hugging her tightly to him, “this is all my fault, if I had just listened to you, trusted you, I-”

“It wasn’t you Harry,” she said in a low voice, “I tried to make it seem like it was but...it wasn’t. It’s me...I’m just wrong...I’ve gone wrong...”

“Kitty, you haven’t-”

“I have! I feel like I’m trapped inside this nightmare of a life...like what ever I touch just turns bad...like I can’t do anything but destroy things and make people hate me!” she cried, drawing back from him now, “Like I don’t even control what’s happening! I’m just sitting here and someone else is doing these things!”

“Kitty it’s not that bad...” he struggled, unable to even understand how he was feeling about it all, “it’s not, I-”

“It is! If it wasn’t then why don’t I have any friends? How could I say everything to you that I did if I haven’t gone wrong? Why would my own mom not even care enough to stick around!”

“I’ve heard about your mum Kitty, and it doesn’t sound like you could stop it from happening...” he tried as she continued to cry, “you’ve had a hard life Kitty and you-”

“I can’t keep blaming it on that forever! It’s always someone else’s fault...never mine! Used to be my mom’s fault! Then it was my stepdads, or my friends, or my childhood! And then that’s all gone and there’s no one left to blame it on but myself...”

Harry was silent, he couldn’t figure out what to say, what to do, in a way he almost agreed with her, but never wanted to say it aloud.

“It’s just me, isn’t it?” she said hollowly, “I can’t stop myself from doing things...even when I know that I shouldn’t! Like I think I’m indestructible, that I’ve only got myself to think about!”

“Listen Kitty,” Harry began, leaning backwards and staring at her in the gloom, “just stop thinking about it like this! You’re not a bad person-”

“But I do terrible things!” she interjected, sounding almost furious about herself.

“But you know you shouldn’t! You know that it’s wrong! And that makes all the difference in the world,” he told her, hating how he sounded so self-righteous.

“But it doesn’t matter, does it?” she said hollowly, “If you spend your whole life lying to yourself, to everyone...”

Harry didn’t know what to say, but Kitty didn’t seem to care. She was too upset, too messed up to even listen to him.

“I’m so sorry I lied to you Harry,” she whispered, voice thick with tears again, “Can I explain why I didn’t tell you?”

“You don’t need to,” he told her, ashamed now about the demands he’d made in their argument now.

“I do...” she tried, “I want to...”

Harry merely nodded mutely, it sounded like something she believed she really had to do. He waited patiently as she seemed to gather her thoughts.

“Since I met you Harry,” she began, sounding slightly disjointed, “I’ve had to battle with this – this feeling, that I’m not good enough for you-”

“That’s not true,” he cut in vehemently.

“It is, but that’s ok,” she said quietly, “I get it. I know that I’m a really bad influence of you, on people...and that given a real choice we’d



never have been friends...never were before all this, at school...but, I don't know, I guess I tried not to notice..."

"Kitty-" he cut in, not liking where this was going.

"Let me just finish ok? I've been practising for four hours and I didn't think about you replying."

He fell silent.

"I know I'm not perfect ok? Far from it...and I don't set out to be this way, I just am...And ever since I met you, I've been trying really hard to forget about this big gap between us. I know that I drink far too much and smoke and...and do all these things you wouldn't like. But I guess I thought that that you didn't mind, or wouldn't care or something..."

"I don't," he told her earnestly.

She bit her lip and Harry could see deep worry lines crinkling her forehead.

"But you do...and I do..." she told him, voice cracking with tears now, "and ever since I met you I've had this thought...this thought in the back of the mind that you were going to leave me....that one day you'd find out a few too many things about me and give up...and tonight, tonight I knew that the day had come. So I thought, what's the point trying to stop the inevitable? You're going to go someday, so may as well be sooner rather than later. It'd hurt too much otherwise..."

Harry had never realised she been holding all these thoughts inside her and could do nothing but stare at her pale face in the gloom for a moment, mouthing wordlessly.

"Why do you do it then Kitty?" he asked tentatively, "You hate yourself for it, you were so sure I'd leave because of it...so why do you do it?"

“I don’t know...” she replied glumly, “I started dealing years ago, when I was here last time, you know, to make money for me and my mom...And then when I moved in with my stepdad, well you can guess what happened next...That’s why I got chunked out of my last school, I lied about failing my exams, I never even got around to taking them...”

“But it screwed up your life so much,” he protested, still unable to understand, “so why did you keep doing it?”

“Because if I hadn’t how would me and my mom afford to live?” she said simply, bitterly, “All she did was sit in our latest shelter or crash and shoot up or drink herself stupid, so how else could we eat?”

“But she’s not around anymore Kitty,” Harry told her gently, “you don’t need to do that anymore.”

“I know. But...”

“But what?” he pressed.

“Harry, please don’t take this the wrong way,” she said anxiously, “but you’re rich, right? And all I hear from everyone is ‘why is he with you’, they reckon you’re just in it for the laugh - so I thought, if I had loads of money, that it would all be ok...that you’d stay...”

There was a short silence after this as Harry just gawped at her in the dark.

“You’re kidding right?” he finally burst out in incredulity, “You think the only reason I’d be with you was if you had money?”

“No...but you sound so posh and I-” she began meekly.

“Come on Kitty!” he almost laughed, “The only reason I sound like this is because I grew up with the Dursley’s and the stupid airs and graces they put on, thinking their so upper class just because they’ve

got a company car! I don't even know what my real accent should be - what my parents sounded like or where they came from!"

Kitty gave a slight sniff and there was an air of embarrassment in her voice when she said, "I didn't say it made sense...sorry..."

Harry gave a shrug that she'd see in the dark, as if to say it didn't matter.

"Can I tell you something too?" he asked her suddenly.

"Sure..." she said, sounding terrified at the prospect.

"I knew you felt like that ages ago," he admitted, cheeks flushing with embarrassment, "the first night I overheard you and Donna talking, when she said I was just a rich boy looking for a holiday and...and a quick shag."

"Oh," she said hollowly, sounding utterly mortified, "oh God...how embarrassing..."

Harry was incredibly thankful it was so dark in the room, because his cheeks were flushed dark red.

"But...but you know that's not why I'm here right?" he tried.

"You're not?" she asked, sounding almost upset by this.

It took a few seconds for Harry to realise why and when he did he blushed even darker.

"No! I mean, yes, but..." he trailed off, lost in a sea of embarrassment and confusion now, "you know what I mean, don't you?"

"Yeah," she said, sounding as if she were just as uncomfortable with the conversation as he was now, "but that's what I thought anyway Harry...and all Donna ever told me was that, so after a while you begin to believe..."

“You shouldn’t have trusted Donna,” he told her quickly, pleased for the conversation change, “ever since the first day she was weird about everything...I wanted to tell you, but I thought she was your friend...”

“I know,” she said heavily, “I thought she was just like that because she fancied you - which she did...but turns out she hated my guts to boot, which is nice to know...”

“Too much bad blood?” he suggested, not daring to tell her that he’d overheard her last argument with Donna.

But Kitty must have guessed something because she was silent for a moment.

“Yeah...you’ve heard me talk about Carla haven’t you, and that she died?”

“I think you said something about it,” he said cautiously.

He didn’t want to remind her of what she’d been yelling about it just before she’d ran away.

“Well that was my fault,” she said in a tight voice, “we were out clubbing together when it happened...I tried to help her...”

She broke off and Harry could hear the tears in her voice again.

“What happened?” he asked quietly.

“She...” she began, before correcting herself, “...we had taken some pills in the club...and she just collapsed...”

Harry sighed deeply and pulled her into a tight embrace.

“It wasn’t your fault Kitty - horrible things happen to people all the time...”

“It was my fault!” she protested quietly, “If she hadn’t been with me...”

“You can’t think about the what ifs,” Harry told her quietly, “or they’ll drive you mad...believe me...”

“How do you know?” she asked miserably, “I bet you never killed anybody!”

Harry swallowed slightly, “I know because I got somebody killed...too many people.”

Kitty stiffened up and after a moment drew out of his arms and tried to peer at him through the dark.

“What do you mean?” she whispered.

“Sirius,” he said and she gave sudden gasp of remembrance, “and when I was 14, this boy from my school, Cedric...He got caught up in a fight that wasn’t his...”

“Tom Riddle?” guessed Kitty, wide-eyed now.

“ Yeah...” said Harry heavily, remembering that night in the graveyard with a shudder, “So I know what it feels like to blame yourself for things that have happened...”

“I can’t help it,” she said breathlessly, “everyone here blames me...I knew that if I told you, you’d hate me for it, and I didn’t want to lose you!”

“I understand,” he told her, “I just wish you’d tried to explain earlier...”

“I already told you why, I knew you were breaking up with me!” she said in a choked voice.

“I wasn’t - I didn’t want to...” he tried, “I just so angry and said things I didn’t mean and then...”

“Because I wouldn’t listen,” she countered, voice sounding thicker with tears by every word, “and I don’t understand how you can still possibly want to be with me...with everything I’ve done, and said, how can you even stand to look at me?”

She broke off, unable to continue any further and Harry couldn’t comprehend what she meant.

“Kitty, the only thing I can’t stand is the way you talk about yourself,” he told her through a constricted throat, “and how you make everything so hard for yourself...”

“I do it because I know I don’t deserve you!” she told him, clinging to the front of his shirt tightly.

“Kitty, you deserve the world, and I’d give it to you in a second, just to see you smile.”

Harry didn’t know where that came from and it seemed to shock her almost as much as it shocked himself because she stopped crying and looked up at him incredulously.

“Why?” she asked breathlessly, eyes searching his.

“I don’t know,” he said humour entering his voice, “all this shit you’ve put me through and I still don’t care.”

She gave an involuntary splutter of laughter and for a moment she merely clung onto his front and breathed deeply.

“I’m so sorry I hit you,” she said finally.

“Don’t worry,” he assured her, thinking of his cut cheek, “I think I deserved it.”

She shook her head, but let his comment pass, watching him for a long time.

“I’m sorry I said you didn’t trust me,” he told her, face flushing with embarrassment at what he’d said, “you were right, you’ve done so much to prove it already.”

“No, you were right, that’s why I was angry I guess,” she said in a heavy voice, “I honestly thought that if I told you, you wouldn’t want to be with me anymore...”

She gave a sniff, as more tears ran down her cheeks. Harry felt a horrible sense of guilt inside him that he didn’t think he’d ever be able to get over. He wrapped his arms around her and merely lay their for some time, thinking about how close he’d been from losing her, how it had felt as if he were suffocating with the pain. She still had tears rolling silently down her face and his heart gave a pang.

“I’m sorry I made you cry,” he said softly.

She gave a quiet sigh and leaned her forehead against his, running a hand down his face.

“Why did you come back?” he asked her timidly.

“I realised that the fact it hurt so much...meant we have something special...and I didn’t want to let it go...”

He didn’t think he’d ever heard her be so honest about anything and he felt like something big had just passed that he couldn’t fully comprehend.

“And because I realised that...that I love you,” she told him, eyes downcast.

Harry stared at her, unable to breathe. She looked up into his eyes and without another thought he closed the small gap between them, placing a soft kiss on her lips which she responded to instantly, as if expecting it. She shuffled closer to him, not breaking for air until the

last possible moment as he snaked his arm around her waist again. He leaned towards her again and caught her lips in a more intense kiss which she returned with building passion as she placed her hand on the side of his face again.

And all the time Harry couldn't help but think he was the luckiest person in the world, lucky because he met her, lucky because she always understood, lucky because she came back...

After a long, passionate kiss, Harry moved forwards, half guided by her until he found himself lying on top of her as the kisses became more desperate – and when they broke away for breath he gave a smile of true happiness, brushing her braids off her face tenderly.

“And do you know what?” he asked her in a low voice.

“What?” she breathed, giving him a slight kiss.

“I love you too Kitty Earl,” he whispered, before giving a laugh, “always have, always will.”

She gave an incredulous laugh and leant forwards to catch his lips with another, long passionate kiss. And Harry didn't care if there were a million Death Eaters waiting just around the corridor for him now, or if Voldemort would finish what he started, or if Dumbledore swooped down on him tomorrow.

Right now he was perfectly happy.

Harry groggily re-entered consciousness the next morning, aware instantly that he'd had only a few hours sleep at the most and that he was exhausted. It took a few moments for life and memory to filter into his brain and when yesterday came back to him he gave a frown and a slight groan.

That was the most horrible argument, the worst he'd felt...

Still frowning, he stretched slightly at all once froze where he was.



He pulled his eyes open and was greeted by a mass of Kitty's dreadlocks.

He stared at them for a moment, expression one of shock before quickly being replaced by a disbelieving grin. As if sensing this she gave a murmur of someone waking up very slowly and he watched her reaction silently. She did almost the same as him, attempted to stretch and suddenly froze when her feet touched his. He heard her give a slight laugh before turning over to face him.

"Good morning," he whispered, trying not to grin.

"Good morn-" she murmured happily before stopping suddenly.

Her eyes snapped open and she stared at him in shock. His smile faltered slightly.

"What?" he asked anxiously.

She sat up, propping herself on her elbows as she continued to stare at him in confusion. Harry had the horrible feeling that she was really, really upset to find him there.

"Sorry," he apologised quickly, sitting up to and making to get up.

She grabbed his arm to stop him and after a moment managed to unstick her tongue and speak.

"Harry - why...why's you're hair black again?"

He stared at her blankly for a moment before pulling down a strand of his hair and remembered fixing it the day before after she left. He gave a slight laugh and she grinned too.

"I did it yesterday," he explained, lying back down and giving another laugh, "you scared me then..."

"Scared me too," she laughed, dropping back down to and rolling over to face him, "why did you dye you're hair again?"

“Dunno,” he shrugged, “I did a lot of stupid stuff yesterday...”

“Me too,” she told him, before grinning widely, “lot of crazy things.”

He gave a laugh at her cheeky expression and she leant down and gave him a quick kiss.

“I can’t believe you came back,” he said happily moments later.

“Nor can I,” she said, eyes slightly downcast now, “never done it before - but I’m so glad I did...”

“Me too,” he replied, wondering if all this was going to change everything, whether things would be the same now.

“Harry...” she began hesitantly, and he realised she must have been thinking the same as him, “we’re still...good, aren’t we? After before...”

She raised her head slightly to look at him and he gave her as serious a look as he thought she could handle.

“Yeah, of course.”

“Right. So, it doesn’t, you know, change anything now?” she continued worriedly.

“In a way it does,” he began, and she gave him such a frightened look he hastened to add, “in a good way. I mean, we said some stuff that probably should have been said ages ago...”

“That’s what I think too,” she said in relief, “I was worried about it for ages...but now we’ve been more honest with each other, it’ll all be ok, won’t it?”

“Yeah,” he said with a reassuring smile on his face.

But on the inside his mind was screaming at him. About honesty, about safety, about Voldemort. About how he'd decided that running wasn't going to save him, about how for a few days now he'd been dreaming of returning to his world.

And how last night had been the first time Kitty had been with him in his dream, walking into the magical world.

"Kitty," he began and she raised her head of his chest again and looked at him brightly, "I've er, got something really important I want to talk to you about."

He said it all in a rush and her smile faltered slightly.

"Now?" she asked in her most disarming way.

"Er," and now his courage had left him.

The words 'I'm a wizard' suddenly seemed too crazy, too ludicrous to even contemplate saying right at that moment. And she didn't want to hear it, he could see it in every inch of her face, she didn't want any more revelations, no more stories or deep discussions. She wanted nothing more than to enjoy the day they'd woken up into.

"Harry?" she said suddenly, surprising him, "I said now?"

"Yeah, er, well," he began anxiously, arranging the words in his head, "Kitty I'm..."

A wizard...say it, just tell her, about Voldemort, your parents, about Sirius, Ron, Hermione, Hagrid, Hogwarts...everything, tell her everything.

Now.

"You keep trailing off Harry," she laughed nervously, pushing herself further away from him.

"Sorry," he said quickly, "I just wanted to tell you that, that er, I'm..."

You can't go back without her, his head screamed at him, and you have to go back. There's no way you can stay away any longer - she loves you, she won't care...

"What?" she whispered.

He looked up into her blue eyes and realised that she was actually scared of what he was going to say. And he couldn't blame her, he was too scared to tell her himself, not right now anyway.

"It's nothing," he said finally, giving her a smile, "I'll tell you later."

"Nothing?" she queried, searching gaze flicking across his face.

"Seriously, it can wait till later," he reassured.

"Ok?" she nodded, still looking slightly worried, "later today?"

"Later today," he promised, insides writhing.

"Is it something good or bad?" she asked him.

"It's not good or bad," he shrugged, "it just is."

"Sounds ominous," she said.

"Don't worry," he said, plastering a big smile on his face, "how about we head off?"

"Off?" she asked, still slightly confused.

"We're leaving today right? Onto the next place? How about we do something today and then get a train somewhere?"

"Really?" she said, worry seeming to evaporate as she felt comforted by his smile, "Ok, sure. What shall we do?"

We're going to have a crash course in the magical world he thought to himself...

"I don't know..." he began, casting around for something suitably different that she'd like, that'd get her in a good mood, "how about...we go out for lunch?"

"Lunch?" she asked, eyebrow raised, "Where to, McDonalds?"

"No!" he laughed, "I said somewhere different!"

"What like? Burger King?" she said in confusion, "you know I can't stand Burger King with its-"

"Not fast food!" he cut in as she set off for a ramble, "I mean like proper lunch! Like dinner-type-lunch..."

She gave him a suspicious look before grinning slightly.

"Are you asking me on a date Harry Potter?" she said slyly.

"Yeah, I suppose I am," he said casually, cheeks only slightly tinged with a blush.

"It's a bit late you know," she added, "we have been going out for how long now? And living together, sort of."

"I know, I guess I'm a reverse romantic," he told her and she giggled happily.

"I've never been take out for lunch before," she told him, looking suddenly excited.

"Good, so you've got nothing to compare it to if it all goes wrong," he said, "now go put your gladrags on and we'll get going, it's nearly lunchtime!"

“Really?” she asked, before seeing he was serious and sitting up and looking for clothes, “great! Ok, give me half an hour!”

“Why so long?” he called as she dashed from the room, wearing his teeshirt.

“We’re making an effort right?” she shouted back, “And comb your new hair!”

“I always comb my hair,” he yelled.

Kitty just laughed.

AN/ Ooh...Sorry about the incredibly long wait, I’ve had one hell of a time with work! But I managed to put archaeology to one side for a moment and carve a little space to get this chapter out! I’m anxiously awaiting what all my faithful reviewers have to say about this, half of you wanted Kitty to disappear forever!

But, fear not, the things you’ve been prompting me to do for the past 10 chapters is happening NEXT! Patient waiting my little muggles! And here’s a little tidbit to whet your appetite!

“Well, well, well,” came a rasping voice from underneath the black mask, which was inches from her own face, “look what I found...”

Kitty kicked out roughly causing the man to release her instantly and she fell to the floor, turning around quickly as she tried to find the gun. She dove for it, fingers inches from grasping the handle but was stopped by a sudden weight that was pressing down on her back

“You know I’m going to enjoy making you pay for what you just did,” came the spine tingling voice again, inches from her ear.

He grabbed a fistful of her hair and yanked her head backwards and she fought the terror that was taking over her as she looked up to see a very sharp knife being lowered to her throat. She wanted to scream, shout for help, cry out, anything, but instead she was silent, shaking uncontrollably as the man sitting on her spine pressed the blade against her skin.

“A muggle death for muggle filth...” whispered the voice in her ear once more.

Dum dum dummmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm! To Be Continued!

## Chapter Eighteen

Life is no life to him that dares not die,  
And death no death to him that dares not live.

Kitty stared at her reflection in the mirror for a long moment, wondering vaguely why she didn't look any different. She felt different and she was sure that it must be visible somehow. She didn't even know what it was that made her so different now, she felt older, wiser, smarter.

"Luckier," she murmured to herself, breaking into a wide grin as she saw Harry walk past the doorway.

She still felt like she had that first day she'd kissed him, nervous butterflies in her stomach, which jolted every time she saw him, but in a nice way. And after last night she felt even more sensitive to him being around.

"Are you not ready yet?" he asked suddenly, head poked around the doorframe.

She jumped slightly, grinning excitedly at him in the mirror.

"Just putting my face on!" she replied, pulling out her mascara and quickly brushing it across her eyelashes for proof.

Harry just laughed and disappeared again and Kitty couldn't take the stupid smile off her face. She couldn't quite believe that it had all worked out. After everything that had happened yesterday, after the days of fights and lies and secrets, that it was all forgotten, in the past...That her and Harry were leaving.

"Kitty, come on! It's nearly lunch time!" Harry called once more.

"Coming!"

She noticed how nervous he was, flitting about the flat, tidying things, checking they had everything, hovering nervously over her shoulder.



Trying to hide it with a confident smile, as if she wouldn't notice. She gave a heavy sigh, she knew exactly why he was acting like this.

He wanted to go home.

She had already resigned herself to the fact that Harry's 'important news' was him telling her he wanted to go back to Surrey. She didn't quite know how she felt about this, but in a way she realised that Harry would never be happy living this kind of life, that he needed to be where he needed to be. And if that was what he wanted, then she'd be there with him.

Harry called her again and she quickly packed away her makeup, straightened her wild hair slightly. When she entered the living room Harry was just placing an envelope on the coffee table and she looked at it curiously.

"It's for Donna," he said over his shoulder.

"Oh," she frowned, not quite sure how she felt about her friend after yesterday, "right."

"I thought she might like to know," he shrugged, watching her closely for a reaction.

"Good idea," she said finally, wondering whether she ought to write one to.

"It's from the both of us," he added, "I gave her some rent money too."

"Yeah," she nodded, "good thinking. I think she did well to put up with me for so long."

Harry grinned and Kitty's stomach lurched happily. She couldn't help but smile back and Harry reached out and took her hand, pulling her up to him.

“So, are we ready?” he asked her, looking a strange mixture between nervous and excited.

“Cocked, locked and ready to rock,” she replied, still fighting to keep a goofy grin off her face.

“Yeah?” he grinned, “We’re gonna do this?”

“Yeah!”

He leant forwards and gave her a long kiss and she wrapped her arms around his neck, losing herself in the kiss. She still couldn’t quite believe her luck, sure that something would come along soon enough to ruin it all - things never went right for her for long...

She was beginning to feel quite light-headed and slowly became aware that she was leaning so heavily against Harry that he was practically propping her up. Slightly muzzily, she tried to focus back in on the real world, their imminent journey and whether Donna would be back soon.

“Shouldn’t we go?” she whispered slightly breathlessly, forehead still leant against Harry.

“Nah,” he replied, leaning forward and kissing her again.

She grinned into the kiss, allowing herself another minute before she pulled away again.

“Think we should...” she teased.

“Ok...” he said heavily, as if this was the last thing in the world he wanted to do.

Kitty looked into his eyes for a moment, wondering why he was so worried about simply telling her he wanted to go home. Surely he realised that about last night, after the L-word, something this small wouldn’t matter. She almost wanted to tell him now, second guess

him so he didn't have to worry anymore. But in a way she realised that he needed to tell her.

"Kitty?" he began, sounding even more worried now.

"Yeah?" she asked, comforting smile on her face.

"Everything's going to be alright," he told her seriously.

She stared at him with the slightest frown of puzzlement. He sounded as if they were going into a battle they couldn't win.

"I know it will Harry," she told him equally as seriously.

"Good," he nodded, almost trying to convince himself along with her, "We'll be fine."

She leant forward and gave him a long kiss. She was too worried to say anything else, because Harry looked terrified. Why she pulled away she gave him a slight smile.

"Love you," she told him.

"Love you too," he replied.

"Let's go then."

They picked up their bags, slung them across their shoulders and walked to the front door. Without looking back over their shoulders they walked out, closed the door, locked it and posted their keys through the letter box.

Harry held out his hand and Kitty took it, walking down the corridor, around the corner and onto the stairwell.

Remus, Tonks and Bill stepped off the stairwell and onto the long corridor. Various groups of people were walking here and there, congregating outside doors or shouting a conversation to people on the other side of the square below.

They were all forced to press their backs against a wall when a group of kids ran full pelt past them, yelling and screeching at each other.

“56b...56b...” Tonks was muttering, consulting her piece of paper and looking at the numbers painted on the door.

“This is 56a,” Bill said, pointing to the nearest door, “next one...”

“Here we go,” said Remus as they stood outside it, “56b.”

“Her name's Donna Grace right?” asked Tonks as she knocked on the door.

Both Remus and Bill nodded and for a long moment they waited in silence. There was no answer.

“No one's home,” said Tonks after another round of knocking, “great.”

“It was a long shot anyway,” sighed Remus, “let's go.”

The three of them turned around and came face to face with a tall girl, around 18 years old, young toddler balanced on her hip. She was staring at them in a very challenging way.

“Can I help you?” she demanded.

“Oh hello, perhaps, yes,” began Remus, taken by surprise, “you're not Donna Grace by any chance are you?”

“Who's asking?” she said suspiciously, eyeing the three's attempt to dress in muggle clothing.

Tonks as usual, was perfect but both Remus and Bill had settled for long overcoats that gave that familiar feeling of length associated with robes. Trouble was, it's the middle of summer.

“My name’s Natalie Tonks,” said Tonks with a bright smile, “I was just looking for some friends of mine and I was wondering if you’d seen them?”

The girl features flickered slightly before becoming carefully blank. She hoisted the baby up slightly as it gurgled happily and cast an eye over the three again.

“Well, who are they then?” she merely asked.

“Catherine Earl and Harry Potter?” Remus replied.

The girl expression didn’t give anything away this time and Tonks studied her intently, unable to put aside the Auror in her.

“Never heard of them,” said the girl airily.

“Well, we know you used to be friends with Catherine,” said Tonks lightly.

“So what if I was?” she retorted, obviously not ashamed at being caught out lying, “I haven’t seen her for two years.”

“Are you sure about that?” demanded Tonks.

“Pretty sure,” she nodded sarcastically.

“Not seen Harry either then?” asked Bill and Donna’s gaze slid over him again appraisingly.

She looked at them stonily.

“I’ve never even heard of Harry Potter,” she said finally, calmly.

She pushed past them and unlocked her front door and they all turned to face her. Tonks gaze flicked down to the floor, where two door keys were lying. She looked up to Donna’s face and knew

instantly that the girl had caught her look, that she knew what Tonks knew.

“They’ve just left haven’t they?” she asked and Remus and Bill looked at her in surprise.

Donna’s eyes glanced at the keys for a moment again, betraying her feigned innocence. She didn’t say anything though, merely fixed her jaw and curled her hands into fists.

“Please Donna,” said Tonks, softly now as she placed a hand against the door, “we’re just worried about Harry all we want to know if that he’s safe. We just want him to come home.”

The girl seemed to be fighting an internal battle with herself and Tonks felt her excitement increasing - they’d found some trace of Harry! They were so close to finding him!

“Please Donna?” she asked again, pleadingly.

The girl gave a sigh, shoulders slumping.

“You’d best come in,” she said heavily, holding the door open for the three.

Kitty, I’m a wizard...

He shook his head, there was no way he was going to say it like that - she’d laugh him off the face of the planet.

Kitty, you know that film we watched the other night, where the guy could do magic and stuff...

She’d think he was harbouring a secret hobby of doing cheap muggle card tricks or something.

Kitty, you know that night when you got that electric shock off me...

Maybe the best way to introduce the subject wasn't by reminding her that'd he unintentionally used magic on her...Or drugged her with an anti-tracking potion, or hurt her yesterday with a protection spell...

What would you say Kitty, if I told you my godfather could turn into a dog to keep my dad, who was a stag, and his other friends, who were a werewolf and rat, company during their roaming around a magical castle and a forbidden wood populated by centaurs, giant spiders and an intelligent flying Ford Anglia?

Yes! That was definitely the right way to go about it.

"You know, I reckon there must be some unwritten rule somewhere which says the more you pay for food, the less you get."

"Huh?"

"I said, I reckon...oh forget it," she laughed nervously, "I think the waiter thinks we're gonna do a runner."

"Really? Why?" he asked, twisting in his seat to see a man dressed in a penguin suit watching them carefully, "Oh well, big shame."

She laughed again, still impossibly excited to the fact she was eating out, in a restaurant. He had to admit, he was quite impressed by the fact too, he'd never been to a restaurant before - or a successful date. His scar however was twinging now and then and it had taken him a while to realise it was getting more painful as time went on.

"How's your pudding?" she asked him.

"It's nice," he nodded, realising he'd hardly eaten any of his thinking of ways to break the news to Kitty.

If only he'd listened to the story Tonks had told him at Christmas at how her mother had broken the news to her dad. All he remembered was the punchline - something about ending up in St Mungo's with an amusing injury, which didn't really fill him with confidence. He raised a

finger to his scar unconsciously, smoothing it down as if this would dull the pain.

“Is your scar hurting again?” he asked, sounding slightly anxious.

“A bit,” he admitted, wondering what was going on back in the magical world, “but it’s nothing.”

Kitty nodded worriedly and watched him for sometime, smoothing his scar and staring off into the distance with the utmost look of despair on his face.

“You’re not all here are you?” she said to him, smile slipping of her face.

“What? Of course I am!” he told her, giving a big smile for proof.

“Liar,” she sighed, dropping her fork, “what is it?”

“Nothing!” he denied, trying to laugh at her, “Eat your raspberry coulis-weird-thing before it gets cold.”

“It is cold,” she said, “it’s supposed to be. Is this about your news?”

“Kitty! Nothing’s up!”

“You can’t lie to me Harry Potter!” she cautioned him, “Not after last night. Come on.”

I already am lying to you...

“Ok fine, I am thinking about that, but not anymore ok?” he admitted.

“Just tell me now then,” she said bravely, “better out than in right?”

I’m a wizard...I can do magic...I’ve got a magic wand in my pocket...one of my friends is a half giant...another is a werewolf...I’m a wizard...I’m a wizard...I’m a wizard...



“I...” he began, before looking into her eyes.

I’m a wizard...I’m a wizard...I’m a wizard...

“Harry,” she cautioned strongly.

“I don’t want to tell you here,” he said finally, realising the time had come, that he couldn’t put it off anymore.

He was going to tell Kitty.

He was going to tell her everything.

“Well let’s go then,” she said, already reaching down for her bag.

“Now?” he said blankly.

“Now. I’m sick of having to wait, ok?” she said, not angrily, just honestly, “Let’s just, go for a walk or something?”

“Right, ok,” he said hastily.

“You pay up, I’m going to have a cigarette.”

He nodded, climbing to his feet and grabbing his backpack. He walked over to the counter and paid, all the time his head a million miles away, his heart hammering furiously and his head throbbing with the pain in his scar now.

When got outside he found Kitty standing against the wall, shifted from foot to foot uneasily, something white clasped in her hand.

“I’ve never been on a wanted poster before,” she simply said, showing him the photocopied sheet with a grainy photo of her on it.

Harry took it wordlessly and studied it.

“They’re everywhere now,” she told him and when he looked up he saw the wall opposite had the poster too, and the streetlight on the other side of the road.

“It’s going to be alright Kitty,” he told her anxiously, screwing up the paper and dropping it to the floor.

“I know it will,” she said, finishing her cigarette and chucking it the floor.

Harry nodded and reached out for her hand. When she took it they began to walk in silence and Harry gritted his teeth slightly, waves of pain were crashing through his head now. They began heading into the very centre of the town as the familiar conversation ran around his head - how did you say it, how could you tell someone?

All those half-blood families, how did they do it, is there some defined way that you’re supposed to spill this kind of information. He was sure that Hermione would know about some book in the library, probably written by a muggle about their discovery. Or Ron could tell him about funny stories his dad had from work. All at once he truly missed his best friends, wishing with all his might they were here for him, giving him advice, helping him...

But they’re not, he told himself angrily, you abandoned them.

You just ran away, just left them.

And now look at the mess you’re in.

Suddenly, he felt Kitty squeeze his hand slightly and he looked across to her in surprise. She was terrified of what he was going to say, but she loved him, he loved her, and she was still with him.

Would he be with her when he walked into Grimauld Place tonight?

“It’s getting busy,” she murmured as they fought through the press of the crowding shoppers.

“Let’s go somewhere quieter,” he replied, pulling her in a direction he knew where an underpass would take them to a park.

She followed him mutely and he desperately clung onto her hand, half out of need to stop being separated by the crowds, half in expectation she’d suddenly bolt, leave him. His scar gave another stab of pain and he grimaced slightly, trust Voldemort to ruin even this for him, couldn’t he be left alone long enough just to say this? Just to find out how much Kitty really did love him?

He was jostled by a man in a long black coat suddenly and Kitty unconsciously drew closer to him. He swallowed nervously, terrified of her reaction, worried about what he was going to say and expecting at any moment that he was going to have to shout out at the pain in his head.

He realised he was getting himself worked up into a state and before long he thought he was seeing things. With a sudden jolt in his stomach he was sure he’d seen a black cloak through the crowd, which closed in around him. Harry stopped walking, staring ahead for a few moments before shaking his head and carrying on. The scar was truly throbbing now and he gripped Kitty’s hand rather tightly now.

“What’s a matter Harry?” asked Kitty in a frightened voice as he sped up.

“Nothing,” he assured her in as steady voice as he could managed, “I-”

His scar suddenly burst into pain and he stumbled unsteadily as he slapped a hand onto it and gritted teeth.

“Harry?” asked Kitty anxiously, placing a hand on either side of his face, “What’s wrong? Are you ok?”

He straightened up, trying to ignore the spots of brilliant purple light that was flashing in front of his eyes. He pulled her onwards silently, trying to muscle through the crowd as she clung onto his hand desperately.

“Harry?” Kitty asked, sounding almost frightened.

“It’s going to be alright Kitty,” he repeated stubbornly, “it will, I-”

Harry suddenly found himself jostled roughly in the shoulder and stumbled backwards, kept on his feet only by the crush of people all around him. He looked up angrily at the person that had run into him, ready to mutter something rude when his eyes fell onto a familiar face.

Familiar yet much different to the last time he’d seen it.

The hair was a little thinner, with patches of grey in it now, the eyes still small and watery, yet somehow the face had shrunk around them so that they look less rodent-like now. But there was no other way to describe Peter Pettigrew other than rat. Peter, once almost Dudley like in proportion was now a shadow of his former self and at least half his weight, and the rangy man stared at Harry in mute shock.

“Why don’t you watch where you’re going pal?”

Harry was only dimly aware of the sound of Kitty’s angry, anxious voice behind him, fixated as he was by the sudden crash of the magical world back into his life. He stared at the man, expression unreadable as a million and one thoughts seemed to be flying through his head, and Peter seemed to be doing the same, little eyes no longer darting about but fixed entirely on him.

“Harry...What’s going on?”

She sounded worried and Harry tried to figure out why but his mind was strangely blank, it seemed all he could think was that Peter had suddenly been put in front of him, he had this once chance to exact his revenge, revenge for his mother, for his father, but most of all revenge for Sirius. He had to do something now, had to make up his mind...

“Come on Harry, lets go,” came Kitty’s voice again and he could feel her hand on his arm, trying to pull him backwards.

“Peter,” Harry said suddenly, hardly able to spit the word out, “what are you doing here?”

“H-Harry,” he squeaked, eyes now darting around, familiar voice to a now unfamiliar face, “don’t try a-anything...t-there’s too many people here...j-just come quietly.”

The sudden realisation that Peter was not alone hit Harry at the same moment he realised he could feel himself being watched and the pressure of Kitty’s hand on his arm was instantly doubled – she’d realised the same thing. The long black coats he’d seen, black cloaks glimpsed through the crowds...

As if waking up from a dream Harry found himself becoming aware of the promise of magic all around him and he began to back away slowly, pushing Kitty behind him.

“Harry,” tried Peter a little more forcibly, “y-you can’t run!”

“RUN!” he shouted, turning in a flash and pushing Kitty into the crowd.

He quickly managed to push himself to the front, reaching a hand out behind to grab Kitty’s and pull her into the crowd. All around them the shoppers were yelling as they pushed through them roughly, desperate to get through as quickly as possible as the sounds of their pursuers reached their ears from behind. They emerged from a break into the crowds into the market stalls area and Harry skidded to a halt, desperately seeking an escape or direction to run.

“This way!” yelled Kitty, not pausing and pulling him onwards, diving between the lines of the stalls.

They ducked and dodged through the table of merchandise, going behind the stalls and among the vans, crouching beneath the tarpaulins until they finally had to stop for breath. They were hidden behind a white van, backs against the doors as they heaved the air back into their lungs. Harry tried to wipe the sweat off his forehead

and found he nearly poked himself in the eye with his wand. He stared at it blankly; he never even remembered getting it out of his coat and it felt strangely hot in his hand.

Quickly he dropped it to his side so Kitty couldn't see.

"Who the – hell are – they?" she choked out, cheeks red.

Harry looked across to her, gulping down some air as he tried to figure out what to say. However, she must have seen his expression because she gave him a wide-eyed look.

"The people that killed-" she began before giving a shriek.

A sudden explosion of sparks showered down on them as something hit the side of the van just above Kitty's head. Cursing loudly Harry pulled her out of the way, running around the van as two pairs of feet followed. Without even thinking, he pulled a table containing a variety of shoes and boxes to the floor after them and moments later he heard the shouts of the owners and the two Death Eaters who had gone crashing to the floor.

They dodged into the next aisle of stalls, pushing forwards with all their might until they emerged out into a car park. Without even looking around, he pulled Kitty towards the road, senses suddenly ultra heightened to everything that was going on around them. As far as he was aware they were on their own for the moment, but he knew it was only a matter of minutes before they caught up with him and he had to get Kitty to safety.

How had they found him? He was untraceable, Kitty was untraceable, he'd thought of everything...

They had just reached the bottom of a set of concrete steps down into the underpass out of the centre of town when Harry pulled her to a stop, beckoning her over to a small alcove where it was darker.

"You have to get out of here now," he told her quickly, eyes darting up the steps and then all around him.

“Are you insane?” she exclaimed, “they’ve got a gun!”

“Exactly, and they’ll kill you in a second,” he told her, “it’ll be easier for us to get away if we’re separate!”

“What?” she asked in confusion, “No! Don’t be stupid, look we can handle ourselves-”

“Not against these guys we can’t,” Harry cut in desperately, “please, you’ve got to get out of here!”

“I’m not going to just leave you-”

“You’ve got no fucking choice!” he yelled hoarsely and she stepped back in shock, “now just...go...I’ll meet you at the park in three hours.”

“Harry, no,” she tried weakly, although she already knew she wasn’t going to win this time.

“If I don’t turn up,” he said quickly, before pausing and looking back up the stairs again, “well, that’s it...you better go that way.”

He was pointing off down the underpass and she looked at where he said before turning back to him, unable to protest, feeling like everything was being pulled away from her suddenly. She looked into his eyes, unable to grasp the fact that he had as good as just told her he was going to die and he stared right back, sorrow in his eyes.

“I love you, ok? From the very first moment I met you.”

He leaned forward and caught her mouth with an unexpected kiss that was brief but more intense she’d ever felt in her life, heart thumping horribly as he pulled away. And without another word he took off, running in the opposite direction and Kitty could only watch for a few moments, tears sliding down her face. Her feet finally stumbled into action and she turned and ran just where Harry had

said, a horrible pain in her heart that told her she'd never see him again.

"Tonks! There's a disturbance in the centre of town! Death Eaters! Get here now!"

Tonks, Remus and Bill jumped to their feet as the voice crackled around the living room of the flat. Donna's eyes widened as stared at them, shrieking and stumbling backwards as with a loud crack, the three people in front of her suddenly disappeared into thin air.

He had reached the end of the tiled corridor, aware that footsteps where not going to be far behind him and tried to think of what to do. What he needed now was somewhere to hide, somewhere where he could try and figure out how to contact the magical world. He pounded down the next corridor, seeing a door ahead he ran with all his might into it, bursting into the dilapidated toilets. He ran around most of it, trying to find an emergency exit, nearly cursing out loud when he couldn't find one.

And now he was trapped.

He could hear footsteps and with a sudden jolt of fear he looked around desperately for a way out, before his eyes were drawn upwards by a flickering fluorescent light. He saw the thatch work of roofing tiles and nearly whooped with joy, running over to the corner and dragging the bin into the middle of the room. He clambered on top, reaching up to the roof and punching out one of the tiles, which crashed to the floor and Harry flinched at the noise.

He was just raising himself up towards the roof when the doors crashed open and he saw two figures, swathed in black cloaks, enter. With a curse he tried to climb up, but a sudden flash of light in front of his eyes blinded him and the edge he had been hanging from shattered. He was momentarily aware he was falling before he smashed onto the floor.

He could hear the hyena like cackle of the two as they moved around him and he tried to scramble to his feet, but a sudden boot was kicked into his stomach and he was rolled across the floor.



“So nice to see you again Potter,” came a harsh voice from the man that had just kicked him.

Harry tried to heave in breath, dragging himself to his knees as he looked up into the masked figure.

“You got out then?” he spat, staggering to his feet.

“Evidently,” he sneered, before he suddenly threw a ball of light towards him.

His now dulled reflexes were only enough to throw him partly out of the way as the curse tore into his shoulder. He couldn't help but yell out in pain, one hand clutching at the now bleeding shoulder as the other brandished his wand.

“But then again, it seems like I'm not the only one who's escaped from captivity,” he said silkily, looking alert but indifferent to Harry's defensive stand, “isn't that so Potter? But we've found you now – what happened to your mudblood whore?”

“Fuck you!” he hissed through gritted teeth.

“Language Potter,” cautioned the voice.

His reflexes may have saved him the first time, but even he couldn't dodge two curses from opposite directions, and the blasts threw him to the floor. He heard a dull crack as his head hit the tiles and a burst of psychedelic colours exploded in front of his eyes.

“Voldemort won't like damaged property Malfoy,” he managed to say, which seemed to anger the man even more.

“Our Lord has changed his view shall we say?” he hissed, dragging Harry up by his collar and pushing his masked face into his, “and I've got my own score to settle with you...”

Harry gave him a sarcastic smile, before raising his knee suddenly into Malfoy, who gave a grunt and let him go, knees slightly buckling underneath him as Harry tried to make a run for the door.

“CRUCIO!”

The curse hit him squarely between the shoulder blades and he fell to the floor, not even feeling the impact through the blinding agony that seemed to be overtaking every single fibre of his being. Even the laughter of the two men was lost in the sounds of his screams.

Kitty hadn't even emerged into the daylight at the top of the stairs Harry had sent her up before she decided to go back. She could almost hear the pounding sounds of the footsteps that had followed him and without even breaking the motion of her running up, she spun around and careered back down the stairs. Feet thumping on the wet, concrete floor and breathing hard, all she was aware of as she ran down the long dark corridor was the sound of her footsteps echoing all around her and the terror that was creeping into her heart.

Those people, the ones Harry was running from, had found him. And now he was alone trying to outrun them, and he couldn't possibly win. A sudden blood-curdling scream rang around the walls and she stumbled to a halt as she realised it was Harry.

She threw herself to the floor, delving into her backpack and pulling out her stepfathers gun. She grabbed the box from the bottom and tore it open, cascade of bullets rolling onto the floor as desperate fingers chased them, pushing them into every pocket she found before loading the gun with violently shaking hands. All she could hear was Harry and she suddenly found herself running towards the door at the end of the corridor, pushing forward with every effort she possessed in her body before the screaming abruptly stopped.

Without even thinking about it she slammed through the doors and emerged into hell.

Harry was lying on the floor, a dark stripe of blood down one side of his face. There was a man standing over him, dressed in some sort of black cape and wearing a mask over his face and for a split second

she could only stare at him. However, she didn't have time to think as the masked man turned towards her and began to laugh.

"Think again buddy," she said in a trembling voice as she raised the gun up and squeezed the trigger.

There was an echoing boom and a few moments of confusion and noise, the man dropped to the floor, hand clutching his shoulder as the echoes screamed around her. However, before she'd even made it half way towards Harry she was suddenly hit with a heavy force from behind.

All of the wind was knocked out her lungs as she fell onto the floor, gun skittering away as the second man who'd attacked her stood above her. Gasping, she spun around to see the man stooping down towards her and grabbing her by the arm, before lifting her up. She fought tooth and nail against his grip, but he was infinitely stronger than her.

"Well, well, well," came a rasping voice from underneath the black mask, which was inches from her own face, "look what I found..."

Kitty kicked out roughly causing the man to release her instantly and she fell to the floor, turning around quickly as she tried to find the gun. She dove for it, fingers inches from grasping the handle but was stopped by a sudden weight that was pressing down on her back

"You know I'm going to enjoy making you pay for what you just did," came the spine tingling voice again, inches from her ear.

He grabbed a fistful of her hair and yanked her head backwards and she fought the terror that was taking over her as she looked up to see a very sharp knife being lowered to her throat. She wanted to scream, shout for help, cry out, anything, but instead she was silent, shaking uncontrollably as the man sitting on her spine pressed the blade against her skin.

"A muggle death for muggle filth..." whispered the voice in her ear once more.

“Stupefy!”

The knife clattered to the floor and she fell forwards as the weight on her back disappeared. She scrambled forwards to see the masked man out cold on the floor before looking for Harry, who was on his hands and knees, coughing and shaking. She rushed towards him, tilting his face towards her so she could see the damage.

“Harry?” she whispered in a shaking voice, “Harry!”

“You’ve got to go,” he told her quickly, fixing her with a panicked look, “please – you’ve got to go right now!”

“I’m not leaving you now,” she protested fiercely, “come on, get up, we can go!”

She pulled him to his feet and instead of taking off for the door as she expected he merely stood still and looked down at the first masked man, whose one hand was grasping his injured shoulder as the other searched the floor for something.

“Go Kitty,” said Harry desperately, pushing her away.

“Are you mad? Let’s just go!” she yelled back.

“Go!” he shouted, before diving forwards suddenly.

He was picking something up off the floor and Kitty was aware she was shouting at him loudly, trying desperately to get him to just run. However, Harry didn’t listen to her and after a few moments he stood back up, brandishing the thing he’d found in one hand and something else in the other and Kitty squinted at them.

“What the fuck? Sticks!” she yelled, “Are you insane? What’s wrong with you?”

“How many of you are outside Malfoy?” asked Harry in a hoarse voice.

The masked man was staring at the two sticks and Kitty could feel the confusion building, the man was treating Harry as if he had him at gunpoint. As this thought crossed her mind she searched the floor for her gun, noticing it over by the bin.

“How many?” asked Harry again in a louder voice.

“Enough Potter,” said the man in a silky smooth voice, “we did hope you’d be together.”

Kitty sidled to the corner of the room and picked up the gun, looking over to Harry who seemed to be trying to think quickly. He glanced over to her and she gave him a defiant look.

“I’ll make a deal with you Malfoy,” Harry said, turning back to prone man and staring him straight in the eye, “I’ll come with you, if you let her go.”

“What!” she demanded at once, turning to him.

The man on the floors face split into a wide smirk.

“You’re not really in any position to barter Potter,” he said, enjoying himself immensely, despite his injury.

“Nor are you,” reminded Harry, gesturing with the wands.

“Harry, have you gone completely insane?” asked Kitty in a loud voice, still reeling from what he said.

“Have we got a deal, Malfoy?” asked Harry, completely ignoring her.

“Harry!” she exclaimed grabbing his arm and dropping the gun to her side, “We’re home free, lets just go ok?”

“We’re not,” he told her, eyes still trained on Malfoy, “listen, if you get out, you can-”

“Sorry to interrupt,” said Malfoy, looking anything but, “but it’s not really going to be a decision you’ll have to make, Lord Voldemort’s been looking forward to seeing you again Potter, and you’re friend of course.”

He looked Kitty up and down in a manner that made her flesh crawl and with a glare she kicked out, foot connecting with the mans side. He gave a grunt of pain and glared up to her evilly.

“Oh, I’m going to enjoy making you suffer for that, mudblood filth,” he hissed.

“You think you’re gonna get the chance?” she demanded, bringing the gun up in front of his face and he stared at it in silence, “Let’s go Harry.”

She began to back away towards the door and after a moments indecision Harry began to follow her, eyes trained on Malfoy. When they reached the door they ran through it and emerged into the underground corridor once more. It was completely empty and with a hammering heart she looked over to him and gave an unsteady look.

“Let’s get out of here,” he said, taking the two sticks in his hand and reaching his other out for hers.

She took it and twined her fingers around his as they began to run towards to exit, all the time looking over their shoulders, sure that any moment, the hoards of people the other man had promised would suddenly show themselves.

The exit was nearly in sight when Kitty heard the sounds of three whipcracks in the air behind her and when she turned around she was surprised and horrified to see three men swathed in more black cloaks and masks running towards them. She didn’t know where they came from, all she knew was they had to run faster and felt Harry pulling her arm desperately ahead.

She heard one of them shout something and then suddenly there was a massive explosion ahead of them that shook the floor and threw both her and Harry down. She landed on her knees and hands with a cry as her gun clattered to the floor as red hot pain zapping up and down her legs.

“Get up, get up,” Harry was shouting, his voice sounding oddly far away to Kitty

He’d scrambled to his feet and was pulling her up. He gave a quick look over his shoulders as they continued to run for the exit.

“Run, run...quickly...”

She could see light at the end of the tunnel, they were nearly there...

The man came out of nowhere, she hadn’t even seen him catch up with her, all she’d heard was another whipcrack and then he was there and she ran smack bang into him.

She yelled out loud and a strong grip suddenly enveloped her and she was pulled towards the man.

“Har-!” she screamed, before a rough hand was pressed over her nose and mouth.

However, Harry had heard her and stopped running, turning around and taking in the scene. Five Death Eaters were now in the tunnel, four of which were standing in a row behind the one that had Kitty. She was fighting tooth and nail against the man’s grip and Harry moved forwards instantly.

Four wands were raised to him and he froze.

“Stalemate Potter,” the anonymous voice that had Kitty laughed, “and to think, if it wasn’t for her, you’d be free?”

“Let her go,” he demanded quickly, wand held out in front of him.

“Why should we, when we have both of you?” asked another and they began to laugh.

Suddenly Kitty kicked out backwards, catching the man’s legs causing him to loosen his grip around her mouth.

“Run Harry! Go on r-” she began, before the hand was replaced and she gave a muffled shout.

“Let her go and I’ll come ok,” he said in a terrified voice, “I don’t mind, I’ll come quietly if you let her go.”

“How touching,” sneered another voice and Harry saw Malfoy approaching, hand clasped over his shoulder still, “but how is it that you don’t mind sacrificing your godfather, but when it comes to common muggle filth it’s a completely different story?”

“Let her go!” Harry demanded in a loud voice.

“Let me think about that?” he said silkily, as the rest of the Death Eaters began to laugh, “No.”

The man that had her suddenly spun on the spot, disappearing in a flash of black cloak and a whipcrack.

“NOOO!” he yelled, running forwards to where Kitty had just been.

“Oh what a tragedy,” consoled another anonymous voice.

“Coming Potter?” asked Malfoy, as if he was suggesting nothing out of the usual.

Harry lowered his wand to his side and stood up straight. Kitty was gone, and that was all he needed to know.

“Let’s go then,” he said simply.



One Death Eater walked forwards, grabbed his arm and in a second, blackness and confusion descended upon him, sounding of the whipcrack dying in his ears. The inability to breath, to even think through the fear meant that when he found himself teetering on solid ground once again, noise of the hurricane in his ears disappearing he didn't even notice the presence of the other Death Eaters.

"Potter," came the ice-cold voice than haunted him every night.

Harry looked up into the blazing red eyes of the skeletal figure in front of him.

"Glad you could join us."

AN/ Wow! So finally I got this chapter out, sorry it's taken so long (work as usual - for some reason my lecturers don't classify fanfiction writing as a good excuse for not writing essays and doing seminars :S)

So what do you think! What's going to happen next? Any requests? Apart from kill Kitty?

Thanks for ALL my reviews, I've never had so many from so many people who really seem to enjoy the story, even if it is a little unorthodox! I love reading you're views on all the cenes so keep them coming! (They also remind t keep on writing!)

## Chapter Nineteen

Life is no life to him that dares not die,  
And death no death to him that dares not live.

Ron, Hermione and Ginny were sat in the living room of Grimauld place when they heard the commotion coming from the kitchen. They could hear the sound of many voices trying to speak at once and as one, they rose from their seats and rushed to the source of the noise, chess game abandoned. When they emerged into the kitchen, it was to find most of the Order rallying about Moody who was yelling out instructions.

“What’s going on?” demanded Ron.

No one even noticed them and Hermione was the first to notice that they were all clutching a piece of parchment. She reached into her jeans pocket and pulled out Harry’s page from the book, listing all his uses of illegal magic.

She gasped at what she saw.

“Stupefy, 5.12 pm, no location,” she whispered as Ron and Ginny looked over her shoulder, faces paling.

“Ok guys, this is what we’ve been waiting for!” yelled Moody, silence instantly descending, “Potter’s being attacked but we don’t know where – Aurors and Ministry members I want you in that building right now, ear to the ground, I want you to be the first to hear where this attacks happening!”

Kingsley, Arthur and several other members dashed over to the fire without a word and were gone.

“Vance, get over to the Prophet headquarters, they’re bound to pick something up!”

She was gone in a lick of green flame.

“Everyone else I want you in Wolverhampton, hear me?” he ordered, “flyers get your brooms, keep out of sight and your eye out for the Mark, any sign of public disturbance, tracking spells on full for Dark Magic! Go!”

Within seconds the entire room was empty save for the three, who were staring at the fireplace helplessly. Hermione looked distraught and Ron placed a comforting hand on her shoulder, Ginny meanwhile stared at the sheet of paper, eyes wide and trembling slightly.

Stupefy, 5.12 pm, no location...

“Ron,” whispered Hermione, sounding terrified.

He couldn’t reply.

She looked over to him, terror creeping into her heart.

“Oh no...” moaned Ginny in a distraught voice.

New words were appearing on the page.

Protego, 5.17 pm, no location...

Stupefy, 5.17 pm, no location...

Flagrato, 5.18 pm, no location...

Protego, 5.18 pm, no location...

“Do you know what the difference is between muggles and us?”

Peter Pettigrew looked over to the young man sat on a large throne like chair, tilted back on two legs. They were waiting in the church that served the graveyard, guarding the muggle who’d been brought to them unconsciousness. He shook his head silently when he realised the man was waiting for his reply.

“Their brains are wired completely differently - narrow minded you see, can’t believe what their eyes tell them is there, so they just

ignore it, completely unable to conceive of magic” he explained, shaking his head dramatically, “unbelievable isn’t it?”

He shot Peter a quick look to indicate he was awaiting an answer that would match the brilliance of his theory.

“Unbelievable,” he muttered in agreement.

Peter didn’t like Brandon, at all. Even among Death Eaters he wasn’t particularly liked. In fact, his intense dislike of Brandon meant that he couldn’t sometimes contain his irritation or anger at the man and sometimes even snapped at him insolently.

“Smaller brains you see,” he continued, propping his boot up on one of the pews, “small-minded. You know how they classify animals and such - by the size of their brains?”

“Yes,” said Peter, teeth gritted together as he wondered how much longer he could take this.

“They’re actually a lower life-form when you classify them like that!” he said, tutting and shaking his head again in amusement, “that’s funny isn’t it?”

“Hilarious,” he said under his breath.

“Tell you what else is funny? I’ve never really spoken to a muggle before,” he said, crouching down beside the girl now and gazing at her curiously, “I suppose she will understand me, eh?”

He chuckled at his own joke and Peter almost rolled his eyes, something he couldn’t remember doing for a long, long time, back when his greatest worry was not having McGonagall’s homework done. He tried to get a grip on himself, it wouldn’t do to start doing things like showing insolence, where would that get him?

Brandon was crouched down on his haunches now, plucking up one of the girl braids and studying it, before scrutinising her face. Peter

watched in silence, wondering what was going to happen to her, probably the same thing that was going to happen to Harry - only it'd take a lot longer.

"Let's wake her up?" suggested Brandon excitedly.

"No!" Peter tried, just as the wand was flicked.

The girl gave a gasp that echoed around the space as her eyes snapped open. She moved so quickly up into a crouched position that Brandon toppled over in surprise and Peter shuffled backwards in trepidation. She was on her feet now, eyes flicking over them, around her, towards the door...

"Where's Harry? Where am I?" she demanded quickly.

"He's indisposed at the moment," grinned Brandon, "most likely being killed - you're a pretty thing aren't you?"

A look of disgust flickered across her face as she surveyed the man in front of her but Peter noticed she was shaking terribly at what he'd just said.

"W-who are you?" she asked warily, backing away from them slowly as her eyes flicked around the entire room, before noticing something.

"You're guards," Brandon said sweetly, moving towards the girl.

"Where's Harry?" she asked again, in a stronger voice this time.

Brandon began to laugh and in a sudden movement, wrapped his large arms around Kitty, who began to scam and shout, punching and kicking at the man so that he quickly dropped her in surprise. Kitty tumbled to the floor, before jumping up and making a run for the door.

"Stupefy!"

The curse hit her squarely between the shoulders and she dropped to the floor like a dead weight. Brandon looked up at Peter from the floor.

“Good one Wormtail,” he laughed, holding his hand out to be helped up.

“Only my friends call me Wormtail,” he replied stiffly, taking the hand after a moment’s hesitation.

“You don’t have any friends Wormtail,” Brandon laughed once more before walking over to Kitty and rolling her over with a rough foot.

“Feisty little minx, isn’t she?” he commented, straddling over her and sitting on her stomach.

“Leave her alone,” said Peter wearily, “we’re meant to be guarding her.”

“This is guarding her,” he pointed out, leaning over Kitty so his face was only inches away from hers, “that’s the best bit of guard duty, you get to have a little fun.”

“Fun?” asked Wormtail querulously.

“You’ve never been on guard duty before?” asked Brandon gleefully, “Well, like I said, there’s a bit more to guarding than guarding. You get to have a bit of fun too! Take this muggle here, pretty girl, only sixteen, completely powerless, under your control...doesn’t that excite you?”

Peter watched the way Brandon was sitting straddling over Kitty and how he was now toying with her braids, another hand sliding underneath her top and shuddered.

“Stop it!” he cautioned, more bravely than he felt, grabbing hold of the offending arm.

“What? Why-” asked Brendon fiercely just as the doors were slammed open.

They both looked up to see another Death Eater walking down the aisle towards them.

“Our Lord wants the muggle,” he said gruffly, pushing past the two.

He gathered Kitty into his arms and stalked off, leaving Brendon and Peter glaring at each other before following.  
Harry and Voldemort stood face to face, wands out but unused.

Harry wondered if this was because of their incompatibility, but gave it little thought as he glanced around his surroundings. The familiarity of it was haunting, they were standing in a circle of Death Eaters and Kitty was nowhere to be seen.

So far all that had happened was Voldemort had commanded the Death Eaters not to interfere and had been taunting Harry for letting himself get caught.

“...and here we are again Harry,” he was saying, “once again you’ve proven remarkably easy to capture.”

Harry glared at him defiantly, “Took you long enough, I’ve been gone for weeks.”

“Yes, remarkable little stunt you pulled there Harry,” he said maliciously, “covered your tracks well didn’t you? Untraceable indeed. It’s a shame you didn’t think of everything.”

“I did,” Harry retorted, gripping his wand in a sweaty hand as he licked his lips nervously.

“Almost Harry, but you forgot one little thing.”

“And what’s that?”

“You’re wand,” he said, grinning widely, “you’re sister wand to my own. You led me right to you.”

Harry’s eyes flicked down to his wand momentarily and it was long enough for Voldemort to dart forwards suddenly and curl a hand around his throat. He fought against it, but the hand was just squeezed tighter until he was spluttering for breath.

“Oh, and one more thing,” added Voldemort, “you’re forgetting that connection we share. I’ve been watching your dreams lately Harry, shaping them, helping you to reveal to me where you were.”

Harry thought of the weeks of plagued, troubled sleep, the nightmares about Sirius and felt a horrible sinking feeling in his stomach.

“Your mind is so fragile Harry,” he whispered deliciously, looking deep into Harry’s eyes, “just a mass of emotions and hormones - so untidy, so cluttered, how do you manage?”

Harry glared at Voldemort.

“And a healthy dose of hatred in their Harry,” he commented, fingers still squeezing into his throat, “fear...guilt...”

The image of Sirius falling backwards through the veil was dragged in front of his eyes against his will and he clenched his jaws. The memory hurt, but at least it reminded Harry that he couldn’t give up, that sacrifices had been made for him to be here, that he had to survive this.

“And rebellion,” noted Voldemort, sensing Harry’s thoughts, “do you really think that I wouldn’t be able to break you Harry, just by showing you your own mind?”

Harry stared at Voldemort wordlessly, showing that he was not afraid. Voldemort looked at Harry in disgust, before tightening his grip and plunging into Harry’s mind. It was infinitely worse than Snape’s Occlumency lessons, Harry had the feeling that his mind was not just



being rummaged in, but being ransacked, that it was being torn apart as Voldemort searched for the way in, for Harry's weakness.

Memories were flashing past Harry's eyes now, the graveyard and Voldemort's red eyes fading away as scenes from his childhood were dragged up. All the worst moments, all those terrible feelings...like he was there again, actually feeling the pain, the sadness...Every memory was ripped from its hiding place, waved in front of his face, crushing his heart, his soul.

"Aah Harry," came a voice from some distance.

An image faded from in front of his eyes, being replaced by two red, glowing eyes.

"What an imagination you have," Voldemort said delightfully, "not content with your memories, you must insist on creating false ones? You're very worried about your dear muggle aren't you?"

The image of Kitty flashed into his mind, deep under the effects of the crucio curse, shrieking and screaming. Another one soon replaced this, Kitty being hit by the killing curse, Kitty being tortured, blood everywhere...all the nightmares from the deepest depths of night, every single thought and worry about her, rammed into mind. He tried to call out for it to stop, but it seemed that nothing existed except pain and the false memories.

"Oh Harry," came the voice once more, "that hurt, didn't it?"

He became aware that he was no longer standing up, but lying flat on his back on the damp ground. His throat felt raw, as if he'd been shouting for a prolonged amount of time and his cheeks were strangely damp. He raised a hand to them, but his wrist was grasped by an icy cold hand and the red eyes came into view once more.

"Did that hurt Harry?" he repeated, twisted smirk on his face.

Harry didn't give him the satisfaction of answering, he knew already anyway.

“I must confess Harry,” he told him, crouched down next to him as Harry realise his entire was now paralysed, “I feel I know you a lot better now. I’ve often wondered how you’ve evaded my capture so many times and now I know - there is no great secret, no hidden power. You’re just a scared little boy, living on luck and borrowed time!”

That last part came out as a snarl and Voldemort leant in closer to him.

“The only extraordinary thing about you Harry, is that you managed to survive this long, living off the life force you’ve stolen from greater wizards,” he hissed, apparently incensed, “You’ve managed to convince people that you are more important alive than they are, made them think you’re worth giving up their lives for.”

“The Boy-Who-Lived,” he spat, “nothing more than a parasite! You don’t deserve the honour of dying by my hand boy.”

Harry felt his limbs freeing up and his fingers curled around the reassuringly smooth wood of his wand. He felt shaken by Voldemort’s words but tried to swallow his fear, soon the curse would be lifted enough for him to make his move, get out of here, find Kitty...

“Ahh...” smiled Voldemort suddenly, and Harry felt his trepidation increase at seeing that mask of evil happy.

“Kitty...” he said deliciously, the name rolling off his snakelike tongue, “I almost forgot about your muggle whore - do you really think you’re going to save her, Harry?”

“I know I am,” Harry replied fiercely, hating to hear her name uttered by something so evil.

“Surely you’ve finished with her now Harry?” he said, twisted smirk plastering his face, “Whore’s are only good for a small amount of time before you have to get rid of them.”

“Don’t call her that,” he said through gritted teeth, feeling a slight tingling as feeling returned to his legs.

“I’ve seen you’re mind Harry,” he reminded him in a whispered, eyes drawing level to his once more, “so I know that’s what she is.”

All at once an image of Kitty slammed through his mind. He was kissing her when she’d returned from their argument and it was so vivid he could smell her damp hair from the rain, taste her lips on his...He could feel her lying beneath him, hot skin pressing against his, hear her murmuring his name...

“NO!”

The graveyard snapped back in front of his eyes and Harry was scrambling to his feet, Voldemort lying sprawled out on the grass.

“How dare you Potter!” he hissed, climbing to his own feet swiftly as Harry held his wand out in front of him threateningly.

“How dare you!” Harry retorted furiously, “Those are my memories! This is my mind! It’s not yours to play with!”

“You’re life belongs to me Harry!” Voldemort hissed in return, also brandishing his wand.

“No it doesn’t!” he shouted back, furious energy pumping around his body now, “It belongs to me and I’m going to live to see the day that you fall and you know it! That’s why you’re so scared of me!”

“I? Scared of you?” he yelled and all around them the Death Eaters shifted slightly nervously, “You were driven to hiding in the muggle world at the mere thought of what I would do to you Harry! What you know is going to happen!”

“I’d like to see you try!” Harry spat.

“lactus!” yelled Voldemort suddenly and Harry was lifted off his feet and thrown to the floor with a painful crack.

He scrambled to his feet quickly, angered more than anything.

“You’re not going to win Harry,” he told him furiously, “you’re forgetting there’s two of you to defend tonight!

Sure enough, as these words were uttered the silent circle of Death Eaters parted and Harry felt himself loose whatever spark had been holding off his terror - he hadn’t realised Kitty had been here, just outside his view.

She was being carried into the circle of Death Eaters by a huge dark shape of a man, towering over her, arms wrapped tightly around her waist as she hung limply from him, obviously unconscious. However when he was standing not more than a few metres from Harry and Voldemort and let go of her, she fell on her feet.

“What have you done to her!” demanded Harry at once, panic squeezing at his heart.

No one replied and the mountain of a man moved away, leaving Kitty swaying slightly on her feet, as if asleep. Voldemort moved silently over towards her and Harry made to move towards them. The curse came out of nowhere and he stumbled backwards to see Voldemort studying Kitty with disgusted curiosity.

“I must admit to you now,” he said looking over to Harry who was still sprawled on the floor, “even I did not consider this of you.”

He gestured to Kitty, whose eyes Harry could now see where half open, blue depths barely visible to him.

“Common muggle filth,” he continued as Harry climbed shakily to his feet, “you’d abandon everything for this? I do despair, are you trying to make it easy for me Harry?”

“Let her go,” Harry asked, eyes fixed on Kitty.

“I don’t think I can do that Harry,” replied Voldemort as a ripple of laughter chased around the silent masses of the collected Death Eaters.

“Let her go,” he repeated as the evil red eyes turned to him, “please.”

The mask like face was pulled into a grin and for a moment Voldemort completely forgot about Kitty as he regarded Harry.

“You’re pleading with me now Harry?” he whispered triumphantly, as if his greatest wish had come true.

“Yes,” swallowed Harry, moving forwards slowly, “I am...Let her go, safely, and I’ll stay here.”

“The-Boy-Who-Lived finally submits to the Dark Lord,” he continued almost ecstatically, “for the price of one muggle?”

“Yes,” he said desperately, heart thumping horribly against his ribs, “I’ll stay, you can have me.”

A whisper was chasing around the masked followers now and Voldemort looked to them. Harry was surprised to see a fleeting look of uncertainty or disbelief. It quickly disappeared however as the face registered only triumph and disdain.

“She’s obviously very precious to you,” he said, distaste in his mouth.

He moved forward, inspecting Kitty even closer now, as if he couldn’t quite understand that after all these years, after all his elaborate plans and failed attempts, plots and strategies, the only thing he’d needed to find was one muggle. His long spidery fingers picked up a braid of her hair, studied it before dropping it in disgust. He looked as if he felt that the close proximity to her had contaminated him.

Harry moved forward unconsciously, desperate to get him away from her. However, Voldemort stood back slightly and snapped his fingers, the sound echoing around the graveyard as if it were lightning.

All at once Kitty crumpled to the floor and now the sound of her ragged breath filled the air. Shaking on her hands and knees she looked up slowly, finding Voldemort's robes in her line of vision. She followed them up slowly until she looked into the face of the Dark Lord.

With a horrified yell she scrambled backwards and tried to get to her feet. However, the Death Eaters merely pushed her back to the ground and Harry darted towards her quickly, almost unconsciously.

"Iactus!"

Harry's feet were wrenched from underneath him and he was flipped over, thrown against the tall statue of an angel standing over a grave. He fell to the floor with a crunch and he cried out in pain as spots of light danced in front of his eyes.

"HARRY!" screeched a terrified voice.

Harry pushed himself shakily off the floor, looking over to where Kitty was, surrounded by a circle of Death Eaters. He began to crawl forwards, climbing to his feet and trying to break into the mass of Death Eaters.

"Harry, please don't let your attention wander," came the high, cold voice.

And then Harry felt as if the same invisible hand that had forced him to bow all those years ago was turning him around, forcing him to face Lord Voldemort. Harry raised his wand against him.

"I must say I'm still curious about the muggle," he told Harry, before raising his voice, "bring her here."

“Don’t you dare touch her,” Harry hissed furiously, causing another smile to be stretched across the taunt, snake-like face.

The large Death Eater had picked her up again and she was fighting tooth and nail to get out of his grip and he stood halfway between Harry and Voldemort. Kitty gave a yell as she was dropped to the floor, desperately trying to get to her feet before her gaze landed on Harry.

“Harry!” she gasped desperately, trying to move towards him.

The large man wrenched her away by the back of her top and threw her to the floor.

“Don’t you dare!” cautioned Harry, raising his wand against the man.

“Please Harry,” Voldemort said, thin lips curling into a sneer, “am I going to have to teach her a lesson for your continued insolence?”

Harry hesitated, the last thing in the world he wanted was Kitty to be hurt, he’d rather stay in this graveyard forever than see one curse touch her. Voldemort gave a pleased smirk that Harry was finally obeying orders and turned back to Kitty. She was staring up at his face now in complete horror, taking in the red eyes and snakelike slits for a nose, shaking uncontrollably.

“Do you know what I am?” Voldemort asked her, bent over, face inches from Kitty.

“A, a m-murderer,” she managed to gasp, eyes wide as she stared at his ravaged face in terror.

He gave a terrible smile, before taking her chin in his long, spider-like fingers. Kitty gave a whimper of terror, flinching away but pushed forwards once again by her captor.

“Do you know what I am?” he repeated deliciously, “what your dear Harry is?”

Kitty began to shake her head violently, "N-no..."

Voldemort fingers trailed down her face and Kitty gave a great shudder, looking away with barely disguised disgust as Voldemort turned to Harry, look of malignant delight on his face.

"Surely you've told her Harry?" he asked as Harry stood rooted to the spot, "No? Well perhaps we should educate the muggle?"

"H-Harry?" whispered Kitty in a terrified voice and he looked over to her, eyes meeting for a moment.

He tried to convey in that one moment everything he'd wanted to tell her since the day he met her.

"Defend yourself Harry," the Dark Lord commanded, raising his wand.

Kitty watched, frozen in her terror as Harry brandished his own wand, swallowing deeply and trying to clear his mind.

"Crucio!" Voldemort yelled.

The curse issued from his wand but met the shield charm Harry had conjured and he barely had time to hear Kitty screaming in horror at what she'd seen before Voldemort attacked again. Curses were flying through the air thick and fast now and Harry was dodging and defending, never managing to attack and tiring quickly. All he knew was that he had to keep alive and awake, because if he didn't, Kitty would die.

However, no sooner had this thought solidified in his head than a curse caught him in the shoulder, slamming him into the ground. He heard the crack of his nose and felt warm blood trickling down his throat.

"Get up Potter," came the voice and Harry pushed himself up, seeing the hem of Lord Voldemort's robes and looking up to meet his gaze. Harry set his jaw and scrambled to his feet quickly.



“lactus!”

The same curse threw him into the air again and he hit another gravestone, rolling onto the floor, chest heaving as he tried to cough up the blood. He could see nothing but the red haze of blood in his eyes and hear only Kitty’s terrified screams.

“To your feet Potter,” Voldemort instructed him.

Harry shakily pushed himself up but was not even on his feet when another curse threw him down with a resounding crack. Harry cried out in pain, he had fallen onto his wrist awkwardly and now all he could feel was the fiery pain of broken bones shooting up and down his arm. Weakened now, Harry couldn’t even raise his wand to Voldemort, who was stood over him.

“Crucio!”

The pain of the unforgivable curse pierced into every cell of Harry’s body - a thousand knives gouging deep into his skin, every nerve and fibre of his being on fire as he screamed and screamed...the pain going on and on until he thought he must surely die soon...that he could never survive...that nothing existed in the world except him and this unbearable pain...

And then it lifted and slowly and Harry’s other senses returned to him - he could smell the damp earth and wet grass that his face was pressed into, he could hear Kitty screaming, begging, pleading...her terrified voice carrying into his consciousness from what seemed like a great distance. Every single muscle and bone in his body was still on fire and merely rolling over seemed to make him feel as if the curse was upon him once again.

Cold air stung his face and he pulled his eyes open to see the world tilted to the side, vision half obscured the grass of the graveyard and the blood in his eyes. But as he stared ahead, unable to stop the aching, quick gasps of pain his eyes fell upon Kitty. She was desperately trying to break free of the grip of the Death Eater,

face a mask of tears and blood and terror as she shouted something to him, but it was so far away...so distant...

He coughed violently, trying to spit out the blood that was making it hard to breath.

“Harry!”

It was her voice, so familiar, so safe, the one he loved, it didn’t belong here...

“Pl-please H-Harry! Get u-up!”

He raised his head from the grass a little, he had to get to her, they were going to hurt her...he had to protect her. It took every ounce of willpower he owned to roll onto his front, to push himself to his hands and knees, to tell himself just to crawl forwards, just a little bit, a little more.

“Harry!”

“Kitty...” he whispered faintly, vision swimming.

There was laughter all around him, high-pitched and cold, harsh and delighted, voices coming from all around him...But Kitty was shouting to him, encouraging him, giving him strength, and he crawled forwards, pulling himself through the tall, damp grass until he was mere metres away from her.

The laughter had stopped and suddenly something was stopping him, he felt himself being pulled up from the ground, his feet leaving the floor and he dangled on the verge of unconsciousness in mid air. As he floated eerily above the ground the Dark Lord floated into view.

“Still trying to protect your muggle,” he hissed deliciously, “even on the very brink of death.”

“You won’t hurt her...” Harry whispered faintly.

“Oh I’m afraid Harry she’ll be here long enough to see you die, before she joins you...” he informed him, raising a silver dagger into Harry’s line of vision.

“No...”

“You will be my most famous conquer Harry,” he whispered as Harry thrashing uselessly at the magical bindings, “and you’re going to get the muggle death you deserve, slaughtered like an animal. You don’t deserve magic.”

“HARRY!” shrieked Kitty’s voice through the quiet nights air.

“Get her out of my sight,” snapped Voldemort suddenly and Harry could hear her screaming his name as she was dragged away, “get rid of her.”

“No!” Harry begged forcibly, “No! Kitty!”

“HARRY!” screeched the voice, echoing around the graveyard.

Harry fought desperately against the magical binding, thrashing in the air and calling out desperately to Kitty who had now fallen silent.

“And now Harry, it’s your turn,” he said simply, turning back to him.

The magical bindings were released and Harry tried to scrambled backwards but Voldemort clamped a hand on his shoulder and moved forwards suddenly.

And when he moved backwards, it was to see Harry drop to his knees, gasping in pain as he slumped forwards, hands clutching his stomach.

Kitty was shaking terribly, stumbling and sliding over the slippery grass as the tears streamed down her face. Two men were walking either side of her, rough hands grasping her arms and pushing her along. They had one of their...wands...pressed right against her neck warningly.

She gulped down her terror, trying not to let it show, not to get the better of her. She'd been in some terrible situations in her life, but she'd always known if she'd fought hard enough, screamed loud enough, ran as fast as she could, that she'd be ok. Now, she felt like she had no control over what was happening, unable to even comprehend who and what these people were, let alone know how to stop them. Like if she fought she'd been knocked down like Harry, if she screamed no one would come, if she ran away, they'd follow.

No one would save them. She was going to be murdered here, alone, in some rotten graveyard in the middle of nowhere. And no one would ever know...

No one knew they were here, no one could save them. Harry was going to be murdered by...by...magic.

This thought seemed to jolt her out of her terrified thoughts. It seemed to solidify in her mind until the prickling of defiance crept into her. They couldn't kill her, they wouldn't kill her, like she'd let them! She could deal with this! Wand or no wand, swap it for a gun or a knife...she'd managed that before! Like she'd just let them do this to Harry? Did they think they could possibly hurt her? Did they think she'd just sit back and let them do this?

And with this thought her legs crumpled beneath her and she fell to the floor as a dead weight.

The two Death Eaters stood back in surprise for a moment as they stared at her.

One cursed, and prodded her roughly in the side with a foot.

"Muggle filth," he spat in disgust.

"She's fainted?" demanded another one, voice higher and more malicious.

The first just nodded his hooded head and the high-voiced one crouched down beside her.

“And I thought we’d have a bit of fun with this one first,” he said, reaching out and running a hand down Kitty’s back.

“You still can,” came the reply and the two began to laugh dirtily.

“Its no fun if you can’t hear them beg,” he sighed, sounding rather like a disappointed child.

“Wake her up then,” the first said, already stamping off in the other direction, “just don’t be too long, the Dark Lord will want us back soon to celebrate getting rid of the boy!”

“Don’t you want a go?” he asked in surprise, looking up for a moment.

“ I wouldn’t contaminate myself with that filth,” he sneered disdainfully, “just make sure she doesn’t scream too much, she’s supposed to be dead already.”

“Don’t worry,” he said, almost to himself as the other disappeared into the mist, “I will.”

He reached down and turned over Kitty, who flopped onto her back, deathly pale face looked calm and peaceful. The Death Eater straddled over her so that he was sitting on her stomach and leant forwards until his face was only a few centimetres from hers. He ran his fingertips down her cheek and savoured the feeling of complete power he held.

“Stupid little muggle,” he whispered to her, allowing his hands to wander across her before drawing out his wand.

“Wakey wakey,” he whispered under his breath, pointing the wand at her, “I’d hate for you to miss my fun.”

Before his spell was even uttered Kitty’s angry eyes flew open and for that split second he was so surprised that he did nothing. With an almighty wrench Kitty threw the man off her, swinging a violent punch

to his jaw, which sent him sprawling onto the ground. She scrambled to her feet, pure fury and adrenalin coursing through her veins.

“Think you can do that to me, huh?” she yelled at him, kicking out violently and booting him in the ribs.

The man cried out and rolled over and Kitty furiously kicked him a few more times before he shot out a hand and grabbed hold of her foot, pulling her to the ground.

“You sick fucking bastard!” she panted, scurrying forwards quickly and practically launching herself at him.

She grabbed a handful of his hair and wrenched his head towards the only thing she could think of, the tombstone next to him. It made contact with a dull crunch that sounded completely out of place and the man cried out, sliding to the floor. Kitty gave a choked sob and without even thinking climbed to her feet, grabbed the man’s wand and backed away.

She turned and started to run through the graveyard, having lost her bearings as she tried to find Harry again. She looked about her quickly, the church was a little way away now, on her left, Harry was on the other side of it...she began to run harder. If she could get her gun back, or make the wand work, she’d be sorted, she could take them out one by one, save Riddle till last, get Harry and run far away, forever.

A sudden shower of sparks exploded against the tombstone next to her and Kitty gave a shriek, stumbling sideways. Over her shoulder a group of Death Eaters were massing around the body of the man Kitty had just attacked and were now hurrying after her. She tried flicking the wand in their direction, but nothing came out of the end and gave a groan of frustration, begging her legs to pump faster.

Sparks were exploding all around her now and she cried out when something caught her shoulder and sent her sprawling to the ground. She fell hard on her chin and instantly tasted the irony tang of blood in her mouth as she scrambled desperately to her feet once more,

chest heaving. The jets of lights and sparks that were bursting all around seemed to grow in intensity as she made for the only thing which seemed to provide any kind of safety or sanctuary, the church.

She needed to get the gun, the gun was in the church, she had to get the gun. The words were screaming around her head as she tried to block out the sounds of the curses, weaving in and out of the gravestones so they wouldn't have time to aim and hit her. Keep dodging, keep moving, find the gun, get Harry...

She reached the porch of the church, practically throwing herself into the heavy oaken door in her haste. She grabbed the wrought iron handle and wrenched it open, slamming it behind her and turning the heavy key with fumbling fingers. As it clicked into place she backed away slightly, panting heavily as she tried to hear what was happening beyond the door, before darting forward and wrenching a heavy table, stacked high with pamphlets and hymn books against it. She backed away even further, before turning to survey the scene - she remembered in a semi-conscious way being near the alter, she'd been woken up briefly and had spotted the gun and her bag nearby.

She began to run down the centre aisle before a sudden voice made her halt instantly, heart thumping painfully in her chest in panic.

"Excuse me?"

Harry was gritting his teeth against the agony, hands clamped to his stomach as he knelt on the grass, they were wet and slippery with blood.

"And now we are alone Potter," he said maliciously, "as it was 15 years ago, so it is again, but now it is you who will live no more."

Harry looked up at Voldemort, who carefully knelt down in front of Harry, shaking as the pain coursed through his body. Voldemort was studying the knife in interest, before waving it in front of Harry's face tantalisingly. The blade shone red with blood in the moonlight.

"Every time I've met you Harry, I've learnt a little more about you," he said, running a finger up the blade before rubbing Harry's blood

between his fingers, “about blood protection...about you’re insane hero complex...about our wand cores. I didn’t want to duel you tonight Harry, we don’t want a repeat of last year do we?”

Harry winced as his stomach continued to burn, he needed to lie down, he needed to curl up into a ball, he needed to stop the pain.

“Hurts doesn’t it Harry?” he said, before suddenly stabbing the knife into the muddy ground and reaching into his robes, “I want it to Harry, I want you to suffer...for every year I spent living as a mere shadow, for every pain and torture I endured.”

He pulled out a small glass vial and held it up so Harry could see it. Harry only glanced at it, wanting nothing more to slump forward.

Voldemort placed a hand on his shoulder, forcing him to stay sitting up.

“But I don’t have time to make you pay as I wanted you to, this must end tonight Harry, for ever.

The vial was raised and quick as a snap, Voldemort’s fingers curled around Harry’s throat forcing his mouth open. Thick, tar-like liquid was tipped into his mouth and Voldemort forced his jaws shut, covering his mouth and nose, suffocating Harry into swallowing. The potion burned his throat and Harry gagged, coughing and spluttering until every cell of his body begged to stop the pain. All he could hear was Voldemort laughing sadistically.

“Insurance Harry,” he explained, as he lowered Harry to the floor, “you have a nasty way of escaping and this time, it will not matter either way.”

Harry’s body touched the cold floor and he lay stretched out in the grass, staring up at the stars as his vision suddenly dimmed dramatically.

“On the grave of my father,” Voldemort intoned in his cold voice, the last Harry would ever hear, “so I shall kill my enemy.”



The tombstone loomed above Harry and the burning sensation that had begun in his throat and stomach seemed to be travelling throughout his body now, spreading a kind of muted pain that was almost a welcome from the agony of before. Even the wound in his stomach seemed to stop hurting now, all he could feel was the blackness of the sky above descending upon him, the stars dimming until the black veil was total, and with a sigh, Harry Potter submitted to the darkness.

Kitty stood completely frozen at the sound of the voice in the empty church. However, it took a moment for her to realise the voice sounded polite, even confused - not cold and malicious like the hooded cult outside.

“I say,” came the voice again, “what are you doing in here, throwing about our property? We don’t want vandals here!”

She turned to see a vicar standing in the doorway of the nave, simple black gown and dog collar mingling with his pale pallor and forgettable face. Kitty didn’t think she’d ever been more glad to see a person as she was in that very moment.

“ Oh my God!” she babbled at once, rushing towards him desperately, “Please, you’ve got to help us! There’s men out there, attacking us! They’ve got Harry!”

“ What’s this child?” he asked in alarm, quickly taking in Kitty bloodied and battered appearance, “Who is it, who’s done this to you?”

“Witches!” she gasped.

“What?” he demanded at once, frowning deeply.

“ Please ring the police, please help us! Please!” she said desperately, reaching him now and clinging onto his arm desperately, shooting looks back at the door, “They’re coming!”

“Of course, of course! But what do you mean by witches-” he asked at once, before cutting off with a startled yelp.

A massive boom echoed through the small church, bouncing off the walls and around the rafters as Kitty and the vicar stumbled backwards. The door had splintered open to reveal a troop of four black cloaks sweeping into the church.

“Hide!” Kitty whispered desperately, already ducking to the floor and rolling under one of the pews.

The vicar however stood his ground, reaching for one of the standards that was affixed to each pew end, it had a large brass cross atop it and he held it out in front of himself as if it were a shield.

“This is a House of God!” he shouted to the group in a loud, yet shaking voice, “Leave now!”

Kitty screwed up her eyes as the loud of laughter echoed around the room now, wishing there was some way to tell the vicar to run, to hide, to get away as quickly as he could. But he was just standing his ground.

“Well, look what we have here,” came a malicious voice as Kitty heard the footsteps of the group moving down the aisle, “a witch burner!”

More laughter and Kitty, heart thumping terribly against her chest, crawled underneath the pew to the next one forward, pulling herself in and making herself as small as possible.

“Leave now,” trembled the vicar, “this is a House of God...”

Kitty stared at the underside of the wooden pew, mental images forming of what was happening beyond. The footsteps had stopped and the laughter was dying down. Kitty could hear the vicars shaky breathing.

“Leave!”

“Why don’t you preach to us heathens father?” demanded another voice, a woman’s this time, sounding high and cruel, “we’re obviously in need of saving.”

There was silence and as quietly as possible, Kitty slid forward under the next pew, slowing making her way forwards to where she remembered her gun was hidden.

“No words of wisdom father?”

Kitty crawled under another one, dragging herself painfully slowly so she wouldn’t make a sound.

“How about this one father?” came a voice and Kitty peered along the floor to see the vicar was now surrounded by the hems of the black robes, “though you walk through the valley of the shadow of death...you will fear the evil, for it’s here, with you...”

The vicar turned and tried to run away, stopped in his tracks by one of the Death Eaters, they all had their wands pointing at him.

“This is your valley father,” said one voice deliciously, “and we’re the shadow of death.”

“Avada Kadava!”

There was a blinding flash of green light and a heavy thunk of something hitting the floor. Kitty opened her eyes to see the vicar sprawled out on the floor in front of her, eyes wide and staring accusingly at her. She stuffed a hand over her mouth to stop the surprised and horrified yell escaping, tensed up completely under her pew.

“Little muggle!” cackled a voice over the laughter that rang through the church once more, “come out come out where you are!”

Kitty shuffled away from the body slowly, fighting to keep the bile rising in her throat as she quickly shuffled to the next pew forward.

There was a sudden boom and Kitty looked along the floor to see one pew not five rows down from her had been shattered and was now on fire. Gulping deeply she began to crawl forwards quicker, breathing deeply and trying to keep the terror pushed far down inside her in some unreachable place. She could go to pieces when all this was over and her and Harry were safe. Now she couldn't be scared. Now she couldn't scream. That was all for the future.

There would be a future.

This thought kept running through her head as she continued to crawl forward, trying to ignore the sound of various pews exploding and jets of light hitting random parts of the church. There would be a future she chanted, she had a future, this couldn't be it, a horrible end to a shitty life. She had a future with Harry, she'd see the sun rising tomorrow, she'd be safe soon...soon...

The pews had ended and now there was only empty space ahead of her. She scanned the area in trepidation, relegating her fear as she looked behind her and located all four pair of feet. Then, swallowing her courage she shuffled forwards, emerging from underneath the pew and running at an awkward crouch across the floor, up the carpeted stairs, under the communion rail and towards the altar. She expected to feel the blast of the green curse at any moment, the shriek of them locating her or a hand curling around her arm. But it never came and she reached the altar, diving underneath the cloth laid over it. She crouch on her haunches, breathing shakily as she waited for a moment as she stared at the cloth that was all that laid between her and death.

She lay on her stomach and peeked underneath its hem, the cloaked people were dotted about the church now, still blasting things, shouting instructions to each other, calling her...and she saw the gun.

It was only a metre away from her, sat on top of her backpack. She stared at it for a long moment, before flicking her eyes back to the Death Eaters. Slowly she pushed her hand under the cloth and towards the bag, keeping it as flat to the floor as she could, eyes screwed up tight.

She stretched and stretched as far as she could before she felt her fingers graze the leather strap and she slowly looped her fingers around it. She dragged it backwards painfully slowly, lifting up the cloth slightly before whipping it in. She froze, waiting for the shout of the voices once more.

None came.

She carefully cocked the gun open, wincing at the click as she checked the chamber. She reached into her pockets which were still full of bullets from when they'd been in the underpass in Wolverhampton. She pushed a bullet into the one empty chamber and clicked the gun back into place. Carefully she put her backpack on, lay on her stomach and lifting the cloth once more and surveyed the scene.

Two Death Eaters were standing next to her now in the middle aisle and she carefully pushed the gun out slightly and lined it up with the left hand man. Just like the video game, she told her strangely calm mind, all those days at the arcades, all those computer games; you line up, compensate for movement and squeeze the trigger.

Kitty squeezed the trigger.

The shot rang out through the church and in the millisecond of confusion and noise she swung it slightly and hit the man standing next to his fallen comrade. He fell to the floor too with a scream and Kitty swung the gun once more, the woman on the right hand side of the church who was shouting, running towards the two men and looking around wildly fell next. Kitty found the last robed man, running towards where she was hidden, brandishing his wand. In a blinding flash of the Kitty hiding place suddenly erupted into flames and with a yell she jumped out, raising the gun quickly and firing one last time at the man.

She launched herself down the steps, running down the aisle as fast as her legs would carry her, refusing to look down or around to find out where the robed people had been shot, whether they were alive or dead. She hit the front door, emerging into the freezing cold, dark

night air of the graveyard with only the sounds of the people inside groaning ringing around her head.

She looked around, seeing another group of Death Eaters hurrying to the source of the shots and Kitty backed up against the wall of the church, hiding herself in the shadows. As they ran past her into the church she took off at a run, circling the church, mind still strangely calm. It was as if she felt invincible now, she'd just escaped death, she had her gun, she could do it again...

Ahead of her the graveyard stretched out into the gloom, tombstones rising from the glisteningly wet grass that looked unpleasantly like robed, hunched figure. As she wove through the grave, ducked at an awkward half-crouch run as she heard the distant sounds of the second wave of Death Eaters tearing apart the church, obviously they thought she was still in there.

She stopped for a second, dropping to her knees as she hid behind a large tomb with an iron railing around it and opening up the gun chamber once more. Her trembling hands seemed to belie that calm state she felt but she didn't care, as long as her mind didn't give in, didn't panic or fall into terror she'd be fine. Her body could deal with the situation in any way it saw fit, as long as she could think straight...

She reloaded the gun and looked over the top of the tomb, she scanned the graveyard. Finally she found what she was looking for, Tom Riddle. He was standing with his back to her some way off, staring down at the floor at something. She began to creep forwards, years of pickpocketing, whether Harry liked it or not, had given her well honed skills in the art of silent movement. She was still crouched, moving forwards as she thought about her stepfather, of all people, and how he'd never hear her.

As she approached within ten metres of Riddle she got a view for the first time of what he was watching; it was Harry, lying on the floor, face turned away from her. The terror she'd been burying deep within her began to unwind slowly, creeping over her as she stared at him.

Do it now, her mind whispered to her, do it now before you lose control.

Slowly, she knelt onto the floor, hidden by a tombstone. Her hands were shaking terribly now and she rested them on top of the stone, pointing the gun directly at the man's chest. She tried to steady her breathing, clicked the gun into place and waited for a moment.

She closed her eyes for a second, thought of Harry, snapped them open and squeezed the trigger.

Once, twice, three times, the figure dropped down and Kitty jumped up, pointed the gun at him once more and fired again, four times, five times, six. She ran forwards towards Harry, jumping over the still body whose robe was now shredded from the bullets.

She got to Harry, hearing the sound of men voices far away, drawn by the sound of the shots. She knelt next to Harry, shaking him violently, but he wouldn't wake.

"Come on Harry," she moaned, tears springing to her eyes now, the terror taking over, "Harry!"

But he wouldn't wake and after a moment she jumped up, gathering him into her arms with a strength she didn't know she possessed, and stumbled towards the trees.

The graveyard was sudden full of the sound of apparating witches and wizards and within moments Aurors were surging through the gravestones, towards the church and the sounds of curses being thrown.

Tonks surveyed the scene as she apparated, before gritting her teeth and running towards the church where she knew they'd find Harry and his girlfriend.

Hopefully both still alive.

Kitty was sobbing her heart out, stumbling and falling through the dark woods as she dragged the dead weight behind her, desperate to get away from the noises of the robed people far behind her.

“Harry?” she cried desperately, looking down to the thing in her hands.

Harry face was deathly white underneath the mass of dirt and blood, his eyes were closed peacefully as his head lolled onto his front, arms and legs dangling uselessly on the floor.

“Harry! Can you hear me?” she demanded, still dragging him onwards, she could see occasional flashes of light ahead.

“Keep awake,” she cautioned, knowing full well he was already deeply unconscious, perhaps even d-

“You’re not dead,” she cried out suddenly, dropping him to the floor.

She knelt by his side and placed a shaking hand on the side of his neck, trying to find a pulse. Her hands were shaking too much however and her whole arm seemed to be numb with pain so that feeling anything like a weak pulse would have been impossible. She sat back on her haunches for a second, tears splashing down her cheeks as she placed a hand on his chest...

It rose and fell weakly and she almost cried out in joy, gathering Harry into her arms and hugging him tightly. His arms dangled uselessly, his head still lolling to one sided as she buried her dirt and blood streaked face into his hair.

“Pl-please somebody...” she sobbed, feeling the despair taking over her, “somebody h-help us...help us...please...”

But there was no one to save them, no knight in shining armour emerging from the dark trees, no one to help...

“P-please...” her voice was the merest whisper, no one would hear her, “help us...”

Harry was going to die here in her arms...



She sobbed in utter terror and loss and drew back to look at him. His face was almost unrecognisable, but through the dirt and the blood she could see him. Her Harry, her Harry who she loved, who she was supposed to spend the rest of her life with, who was going to leave her.

“D-don’t leave me, Harry,” she begged quietly

She tried to brush the dirt and blood off his face, it wasn’t right, he couldn’t die like this, in some dark wood, not knowing that he got away, that he wasn’t with those monsters, that she was there.

“I’m here Harry,” she told him.

She bent down and kissed him, hoping that somewhere, wherever he was, he knew. She’d lost the fire that was burning inside of her, that had helped her escape, now she was just exhausted, she couldn’t cope with it anymore, not alone.

“You can’t go now,” she told him in a tortured voice, “not now...we got away Harry...we’re free...”

After everything, after all they’d been through, it was going to end like this? It couldn’t end like this, she wouldn’t let it...

“You saved me Harry...” she told him fiercely, “in every way possible...I’m going to save you...”

She extricated herself from him and climbed to her feet.

“You won’t die,” she told him, scooping him up into her arms, “I won’t let you!”

With a strength she did not know that she possessed, Kitty began to move quickly through the woods, carrying him. Somehow she couldn’t even feel the weight of him as he trembling legs slipped and stumbled over the wet, leafy ground. All the time she was talking to Harry, but she couldn’t hear what she was saying, it seemed to spill

out of her mouth uncontrollably as she saw another flash of light ahead.

A road!

She sped up and sure enough she came across a small country road, signpost on the side reading 'Greater Hangleton - 1 mile'.

1 mile! That was too far, Harry needed help now. She looked around desperately, eyes falling on a small line of cars that were parked on a slight embankment, a sign nearby pointing to a fishing lake. Kitty placed Harry on the floor carefully and ran over to the nearest one, trying to door handle wildly. It was locked - of course it was locked - she looked over to Harry in panic.

Then, picking up a log from the side of the road she smashed it into the window of the car, pushing her elbow through the hole as desperate fingers sought the door lock. She found it and wrenched the door open, leaning through and opening the passenger door before diving back down the pavement and to Harry.

"Harry!" she yelled, shaking his shoulders violently.

His head merely lolled from side to side and with a choked sob she got up, placing her hands underneath his shoulders and dragging him bodily around the car. He was a dead weight and Kitty tried not to look at the long path of blood that was left behind where she was dragging him. She managed to haul him up into the car seat, where he sat slumped forward as she slammed the door and raced back around, jumping into the drivers seat.

"Keys, keys, keys!" she shouted desperately, searching the pockets and ignition for anything.

But there was nothing there and after a moment of deep despair she bent down and tore the panel off the underside of the steering wheel, pulling free the electrics. Unable to see straight through the tears and blood in her eyes, unable to think straight through the terror in her mind and unable to control her violently shaking hands it took nearly

a four minutes before the engine suddenly burst into life. They were the longest four minutes of her life.

Glancing into her wingmirror she thought she saw approaching black shapes and without a moments hesitation, slammed her foot on the pedal, tearing away from the lay-by in a cloud of smoke and squealing tyres.

“HARRY!” she cried out as they tore down the dark country road, “Harry!”

But he made no sound and a quick glance to her right found him now slumped the window, pale, bloody face turned to her eerily.

“Can you hear me?” she choked out, swerving dangerously as she wiped away the tears.

She tried to think straight, she had no where to go, no one to help her and Harry was going to die if she didn’t act now.

“Hospital, hospital,” she muttered to herself insanely, “got to find...find a doctor, a hospital, anywhere...someone...”

She found her attention had wandered too much and the car was suddenly thrown about as she mounted the embankment to the side of the road, mind almost frozen with terror now, she spun the wheel as tight as she could. Somehow she managed to regain the control of the car and they bounced back onto the road and she began to talk to herself, trying to calm herself down and before long it became some sort of a mission, trying to keep herself sane by talking to herself. It took a while for her to realise that talking yourself was probably not the way to prove you were sane and she began to laugh to herself.

“I just knew there was something up with you Harry!” she said in an unnaturally high pitched voice, “too much weird stuff...too much...and you just...”

She jerked the steering wheel tightly as they rounded a blind corner, tyres screeching. As they straightened out Harry slumped forward,

head thumping against the glove compartment noisily. She began to laugh again, all the time hands trembling as she began to talk to Harry.

“You should have...said...I would...” another sharp corner nearly sent them careering off the road and she jerked it straight, stepping on the accelerator.

She had a very tenuous grasp on reality at the moment and wasn't going to test it too much, after what she'd just seen she was almost scared what she would find if she did.

“You're not going to die,” she said fiercely, turning to him and trying to push him back into a sitting position.

They hit a pothole in the road and with a scream she found herself suddenly in an out of control spin. She could do nothing but brace herself against the wheel, screaming as the tree came towards her and all about her the crunch of metal and scream of glass.

AN/ So guys...what do you think! About what happened, about what will happen next?

A very muggle solution to a very magical problem, don't you think! It's really hard to write about magic from a muggle point of view because you don't know what to call everything! Just try to imagine if it was you in that situation! Reckon you'd have done what Kitty did?

Anyone upset that she did what she did? There is a reason! I just know i'm going to get a ton of hate mail for this!

THANK YOU to all my marvellous reviewers, who read fanfiction at incredibly weird times of the early morning!

## Chapter Twenty

Everything's going to be alright,  
You said to me,  
Everything's going to be alright,  
We'll wait and see.

The first thing Kitty was aware of was the sirens wailing all around her and she screwed up her face, trying to twist away from the sound of the noise when a white hot pain shot through her head. She dragged her eyes open, suddenly finding an influx of light, regular blue flashes that made her head swim as she tried to focus on what was going on.

There were sounds of people shouting to one and other and then she could hear someone talking to her.

“Hello love, can you hear me?”

She tried to say something, but found that no words came out and she raised a heavy hand to her head, finding something strapped to her face. She tried to pull it off before a pair of hands slowly pulled her arm away.

“What’s your name love?”

“K-Katie,” she said groggily.

“What’s your last name love?” asked the kindly voice once more.

“Potter...” she whispered, “where – what happened?”

“You’ve been a car accident Katie,” said the voice in a soothing sort of a way, “now try and stay still, we’re just getting you out.”

“Is he – how is he?” she croaked out, trying to look to her left but finding her head too heavy to move.

“We’re getting your friend out now. Katie, can you tell me where you’re hurt?”

“He’s hurt,” she told him thickly, “before...help him first.”

“We’ve got plenty of people helping him,” reassured the voice, “now what about you? Where does it hurt?”

“Just my head...” she murmured, closing her eyes wearily.

“Yes, you took a nasty knock – you should have been wearing seatbelts. Now, tell me, can you feel your legs?”

“Yes.”

“Can you wiggle your toes?” persisted the voice.

“Yes,” she said.

“And you’re fingers?”

“Ye-” said Kitty before giving a yelp as white hot pain coursed up her arm.

“That looks broken too love,” the voice told her soothingly as she gritted her teeth fiercely.

“Is he hurt?”

“I’m just putting this neck brace on now Katie,” the man answered, delicate fingers working around her neck, “be brave.”

“He...they stabbed him...” she whispered, grabbing his coveralls desperately with her uninjured arm, “he’s hurt...”

“What did you say?” asked the man at once in a shocked voice.

“We we’re attacked...” she told him desperately, trying to make him understand, “they stabbed him...the men hurt him...please, don’t let him die.”

“Ok Katie, we’re doing our best,” said the man comfortingly before turning away.

He was telling everyone what Kitty had just said and she tried to turn to look at Harry. The man however, forced her to look at him and soon she was being pulled out of the wreckage of the car. She was being taken to the large ambulance, strapped into the long stretcher and she couldn’t see Harry.

“Harry!” she called desperately as she was painfully loaded into the vehicle.

There were people all around her but the doors was closing now, Harry was nowhere to be seen.

“HARRY!” she screamed.

Faces all above her, talking to her but she couldn’t hear what they were saying, it was a blur.

The sirens started to wail and she kept crying out Harry’s name.

"Patient is a male youth, approximately 16 years of age, been involved in an RTA," punched out Rita Simmons promptly as the white coats swarmed around the trolley that was racing through the corridors of a massive building some 20 minutes later.

"Massive trauma to the head, neck and chest," she continued as it crashed through a set of double doors, "suspected fracture to the pelvis, left arm and possible internal bleeding from a wound to the abdomen. We've given him 40 milligrams of saline and morphine."

"Well, well, well my son," said one of the white coats as the trolley was wheeled next to another that was surrounded by all manner of machinery, "we have been in the wars haven't we? Well, let's get him on the bed and see what we can do!"

Seven pairs of hands grabbed the bloody sheet the body of the boy was lying, hoisted it up and deposited it on the second trolley. In a

matter of seconds scissors were cutting through the torn remains of the boys shirt and jeans, electrical diodes were being attached to the bare chest, needles were piercing the skin and depositing a variety of painkilling drugs as various latex gloved hands were assessing the injuries.

The doctor that had spoke before was lifting up the lids of the boy's eyes and shining a small flashlight into them, "Pupils dilating fully so he's still with us!" came the cheerful diagnosis.

The nurses and doctors smiled grimly and continued with their work, well aware that a dilated pupil didn't make his survival a dead cert, it just meant he wasn't dead yet. The beeping of the machine was constant in their ears.

"Can someone get onto bloods, we're going to need at least two pints down here," called one of the doctors, as he brandished a needle and thread, "And can someone call anaesthetics, we're going to have to prepare him for surgery if he's going to walk on that hip again."

One of the nurses scurried off and left the team shouting instructions at each other until the doors crashed open and another trolley was rushed in.

"Who's this?" asked one of the doctors, jerking his head across to the second prone figure in the next bed, around which a team of doctors was now furiously working.

"The girl who was driving," said another as they worked, "suspected fracture of the right arm, ribs and head trauma. Lost consciousness in the ambulance."

"Got off a lot better than our one then," he replied as all around the two figures the doctors hurried to work.

"Drivers always do," retorted the second doctor.

"RTA did you say?" asked one doctor suddenly, in a slightly confused voice.



“Yes, hit a tree just outside Hangleton. But she told the paramedics that they’d previously been attacked by some men.”

“That’d explain the stab wound,” he replied, fingers examining the small yet deep cut mark, that was pumping blood profusely.

“Have the police been informed?”

“They’re on their way.”

Among the hubbub of noise a loud beeping noise suddenly peeled out.

"B.P's dropping," called out a nurse, looking at the computer screen and reading out a list of figures, "he's having trouble breathing!"

"Bag him then," came the answer and soon a mask attached to an air bag was placed over the bloody face, being pumped gently by one nurse as various other drugs were being injected into the arm.

"B.P's still falling," she said, "there's some kind of obstruction."

"We're going to have to perform an emergency tracheotomy," shouted the doctor, not in panic but in agitation for the seriousness of this turn of events, "it looks like we've got a collapsed lung!"

Orders were being yelled across the bed, mingling in the air with sound of the slow beeping of a machine and the clatter of metal tools against metal before a long plastic tube was being pulled out of its hygienic wrapping. It was handed across the table to the doctor, who had prised the boy's mouth open and had begun to feed it down his throat.

It was a tense few moments before things began to take effect and the beeping of the machine became more regular. The doctors and nurses smiled grimly and began to go about their business of preparing the mystery boy for surgery.

The first thing Kitty was aware of was the sound of many people going about their business, voices in low conversation and an all too familiar smell of disinfectant. She screwed her eyes up tighter as indistinct memories of the previous day came filtering back to her, she remembered a church...and a vicar...

She gave a low moan and tried to shift position, giving up almost instantly as a red hot shooting pain seemed to push down on her entire chest, making it difficult to breathe.

“Can you hear me Katie?” came a soft voice to her right.

Kitty slowly prised her eyes open, blinking in the bright light as she focused on the plump woman who was standing beside her bed, chart and pen in hand.

“Where...where am I?” she demanded in a croaky voice, wincing again at the pain in her chest.

“You’re in New Cross Hospital, you were brought here last night in an ambulance,” the woman explained, “you were involved in a car crash.”

All at once this seemed to prod her memory even further and everything came rushing back, the underpass, the graveyard, the church, the stolen car...

“Harry!” she gasped, attempting to sit up before giving a yelp of pain and collapsing back onto her pillow.

The woman fussed over her, telling her to keep quite still, explaining she had broken ribs.

“H-Harry,” she said through gritted teeth, trying to ignore the lingering pain, “Is he...Where is he...? Where’s Harry!”

“He’s in intensive care Katie,” she said softly, kneeling down closer to her now, “he’s had an operation and he’s very sick.”

Kitty felt like she was falling down a very, very deep hole and the feeling on her heart being crushed had nothing to do with her ribs or bruised chest.

“No...” she whispered in distress, feeling the tears springing to her eye unbidden, “No! He can’t be...we we’re safe...we we’re ok! We were going to go to Cornwall! And surf! And camp...he’s can’t be sick!”

“Katie,” said the woman seriously, “do you remember what happened to you last night?”

But Kitty wasn’t listening, the horrible feeling that Harry was being stolen away from her by something she had no control over was more than she could bear and she began to sob. Her chest seemed to scream in protest at the moment but she couldn’t have stopped for all the money in the world; the shock of yesterday, the horror of waking up, she couldn’t cope with it.

“Is he...i-is he going to, to d-die?” she choked out and the woman looked at her in distress.

“We’re doing everything we can for him Katie love,” she soothed, “he’s getting the best care and attention.”

“That’s n-not an answer!” Kitty tried to yell, but it came out more like a spluttered accusation.

“It’s too early to say Katie,” she replied honestly, “he’s suffered massive injuries. Do you remember how he got them?”

“Car crash,” Kitty said, some small part of her functioning brain telling her that she mustn’t tell anyone about the events that happened before the crash.

Not for as long as she lived.

“You told the paramedic last night, that you’d been attacked, by some men?” reminded the nurse, “Do you remember that?”

“No...it was a car crash...we we’re joyriding,” she said and the nurse gave a frown.

“Harry had some very specific injuries,” she pointed out, “the police have been called.”

Kitty heart began to hammer against her chest. Police? Their situation had just gone from life-threatening to life-ruining in an instant and Kitty tried not to show how terrified she was by this. However, she failed miserably, bursting out into a fresh bout of tears, clutching her ribs at the agony.

“I’m going to give you some pain relief for those fractures now Kitty,” said the nurse calmly, “get a bit of rest and then the police will come and ask you a few questions, is that ok?”

Kitty shook her head desperately, “I want to see Harry!”

“He’s on a closed ward at the moment love,” she replied, “I’m afraid you can’t visit him just yet.”

“Please,” Kitty begged, “please! I have to see him!”

“I’m sorry Katie, try and get some sleep.”

Kitty screwed up her face against the tears as the nurse carefully injected a clear liquid into the contraption taped to the inside of her elbow. As hurt and scared as she was, she found herself quickly drifting off into a dark and dreamless sleep.

As Kitty slept in the hospital bed on the ward, two police man and woman were stood outside, watching her with the doctor that was on rounds.

“Her names Katie Potter,” the doctor was saying, consulting his notes, “I don’t think she’s local though, we’re having trouble tracing her medical records.”

“We’ll run a check ourselves on the database,” the policeman replied, notepad and pen in hand, “Could you tell us at what time they were brought in yesterday?” asked one, notepad and pen in hand.

“I think the emergency call was made by a passing motorist at about 9 p.m., the car had hit a tree on the bank of the road and been thrown into a nearby ditch,” said the doctor grimly, staring at the bruised, pale girl in the bed, “Apparently he only noticed they were there by seeing the tree, we don’t really know how long they were down there. My guess is an hour at the most, judging by the amount of blood lost by the boy.”

“And he was the passenger?” the policeman asked, jotting something down.

“That’s correct.”

“And who was it that was told that the pair had suffered a prior attack before the crash?”

“Our paramedic, John Wood. She told him whilst they were being cut from the wreckage that they been attacked by ‘some men’ and that Harry, that’s the boy, no last name, was stabbed,” he explained carefully.

“And is that the case?” demanded the policewoman.

“He had suffered a stab wound to the abdomen, not long before the crash though by the look of things, perhaps half an hour?”

“I see...” replied the policeman, still writing notes.

“What do you think happened constable?” asked the doctor.

“We’re not sure yet. At the same time just beyond the woods that the road lies on, the local church was torched, we found the body of the vicar inside it and another, as yet, unidentified body,” he said grimly, “we’re not treating the two as unrelated.”

“Do you think they did it?” he asked in a shocked voice.

“Again, we don’t know just yet. These two might just have escaped from a situation that left their associates dead. We’re going to need to question her when she comes round, if that’s ok?”

“I’ll have to examine her first, she may not be able to answer your questions right away, the nurse who saw her a few hours ago said she seemed to be in massive shock,” the doctor replied.

“Of course, just so you know though, we’re treating both of them as potential suspects in a murder inquiry,” said the woman now, handing the doctor some forms, “so keep a close eye on them.”

“They’re not going anywhere for a long time,” the doctor said dismissively, “the boy is still critical in intensive care, only 30 survival chance at the moment.”

“What about the girl?” he asked, looking grim at this news.

“She should be awake soon, come back in two hours?”

When Kitty awoke for the second time in her hospital bed her memory filled in the blanks with sickening speed and for a moment she could only lie there as each thing got filed and processed. It was like watching a horror movie that had nothing to do with her life. And then she remembered the nurse, what she said about Harry. And the police.

She had to get to him.

She carefully pulled the blankets off her, wincing as she withdrew the needle sticking out of her elbow and swung her feet over the side of the bed. The curtains were pulled around her and she carefully stood up, gasping in pain as her ribs screamed in protest and her head swam dizzily for a moment. She waited for the psychedelic colours to fade from her eyes before she noticed her backpack lying on a small chair by the wall. Gratefully she shuffled over to it and checked it carefully. The gun was still safely stowed away.

She pulled out a jumper and some jeans and spent the next few agonising minutes trying to lever herself out of the hospital gown and into her clothes. Her right left arm had been cast in plaster and a tentative exploration of her face found a heavy bandage wrapped around it, she could help but gasp when she saw her chest, covered in livid looking bruises with an imprint of a steering wheel.

She finally got changed and began to hobble out from behind her curtains before standing more upright and gritting her teeth against the pain as she walked out of the ward. Nobody seemed to notice her and she kept her eyes down, heading to the nearest lift she could find. Amazingly, still no one stopped her and soon she was running a finger down the map on the wall until she found it.

ICU - Intensive Care Unit, Floor 5

She pressed the button and leant heavily against the wall of the lift as it lurched upwards, her only companion a steward pushing an empty wheelchair. She gave her a curious look but got off at floor 4 and Kitty travelled the last bit of the way, heart all the time hammering against her chest.

Was Harry still alive?

Where was he?

What would the police do to them?

Would she get caught?

As the lift doors opened she sidled into the hall and did a quick sweep of the place. Various orderlies, nurses and doctors were rushing about and she leant against one wall, squinting at the whiteboard map of beds behind the reception. She scanned over the names, heart leaping into her throat when she saw one name.

Harry (?) - Room 7

She tried to steady her breathing and looked down to her hands, which were shaking uncontrollably. Gulping nervously, she worked out where Harry's room was and set about watching the corridor, waiting for a moment to slip by unnoticed. It was nearly twenty minutes later before the corridor was momentarily empty and the receptionist had her back turned as she sorted through the filing cabinet before Kitty could make her move.

She could manage nothing more than a shambling lope, desperately trying not to cry out at the pain as she padded across the floor, yanked open Harry's door and went inside. She pulled it too quietly, flicked down the blinds on the glass window and stood with her back to the bed for some time, breathing heavily.

"Hello, I'm looking for my brother Harry, he went missing last night and we're worried something's happened to him."

Remus stared hard at Tonks who was grasping the newly installed magical telephone in a white hand.

"He was last seen in Little Hangleton, we think he's rather seriously injured," she said tearfully.

There was a silence and Tonks nodded before saying hastily.

"He's 16 years old, and he has black hair and green eyes and a scar on his forehead," she told them, "he may have come in with a girl, called Catherine Earl? She has dreadlocks, Midlands accent..."

She paused suddenly and gave a nod, "Yes I'll hold."

She looked over to Remus and he could see every single strain and worry that he could feel on his face mirrored on hers. She bit her thumbnail as the silence crept by before drumming her fingers on the table, then tapping. Eventually Remus laid a hand over hers.

"Yes – hello?" she said suddenly, looking tense and alert.



Remus edged forward, trying to hear what was being said but he could hear only the garbled sound of a telephone voice at the other end of the line.

“What?” she yelled suddenly, eyes lighting up in excitement, “Really!”

“What, they’ve got him?” begged Remus and everyone held there breath.

“Of course – yes – I understand – I’ll be there right away!” gushed Tonks before slamming down the phone.

“New Cross Hospital,” she said faintly as everyone burst into wild cheers and chatter at the same time.

“What’s happened to him?” asked Molly tearfully.

“They’re not allowed to say until I’m positively identified!” she told them, jumping to her feet, “let’s go!”

“Right Remus you better come along, Arthur, you know you’re way around these muggles you come too, I’ll be the backup, Tonks can be his sister and Vance, you can come and oblivate the doctors!” ordered Moody and everyone jumped into action.

The chosen five strode towards the fireplace and began to floo their way to the nearest station to the hospital as the rest milled about looking uncertain.

“Molly,” shouted Moody, one foot in the fire, “tell Madam Pomfrey to get prepared, we’re taking him to Hogwarts.”

Kitty sat on a small chair, staring at Harry. She didn’t think she’d ever felt more terrified in her whole life, not even last night when she thought she was going to die, when she watched the murder of the vicar, when she was sitting in those woods alone. Harry just looked so...battered.

She flinched at her choice of words, but it was the only one she could come up with. His face was covered in bruises and cuts, his skin was so pale it looked almost translucent, and his eyes were closed peacefully. She just couldn't take it all in, she had to look away, trying to remember what he looked like before all this began.

Back when he was her Harry.

Before she found out what he was.

A magician, she said in her head.

Magic. Spells. Curses. This couldn't be real. She'd wake up any minute now and realise she and Harry were in some random pub chatting away like normal, probably about the weirdest dream she'd just had. But she wouldn't wake up, she knew this now. She's seen spells. She seen them, seen what they could do.

Harry the Magician.

She laughed at herself incredulously, looking around the empty room in embarrassment in case anyone heard her crazy thoughts. Magician...she didn't even know if that was what they were called, wizards? Warlocks? Sorcerers? Maybe they were all just called witches? Was there more of them? A whole country full of them? She'd certainly seen at least 10 of them now - where did they all come from? To the best of her knowledge Harry had always lived in Surrey, she was sure he went to her Nursery school and Playgroup - when did he become a magician? Had he grown up being able to do magic, or did he one day just be made one?

A sudden, startling thought appeared in her mind as she was considering this. What if you weren't born a magician, and you didn't become a magician at all...what if he wasn't even human? I mean, she thought wildly, staring down at the unconscious form in front of her, what if he's an alien? It would explain the magic she reasoned to herself, feeling like she was bordering insane, magic just isn't possible, even by her scrappy knowledge of science and biology she knew it was impossible to do half the things the magicians had been doing. They'd travelled hundreds of miles in seconds; like those

transporters in Star Trek, they'd fired those spells (as she'd come to call them); were they lasers? They could move things with their mind, create things out of the air, make them disappear...

Suddenly she snapped out of it - aliens?

She almost laughed out loud, willing to just give in to disbelief. She couldn't believe it, she just couldn't. She was just imagining things surely? She raised a hand to her throbbing temple, fingering the bandages there that had nothing to do with the headache developing - there was just so much to take in, to think about. How did this affect her life for a start, how much of England was populated by these magicians or aliens? How many had she met already? How many of them were still after Harry? How many of them would be after her, now that she'd fought back?

She shook her head again, trying to calm her mind, telling it not to think anymore. Impossible she knew, but she had to try something. She decided instead to focus on the steady beep beep of the machine, finding her eyes beginning to droop in time to the beat. She lay her head on the crisp bed sheet, telling herself she would only close her eyes for a few moments however, she found it impossible to open her eyes again and was almost grateful to be falling into a deep sleep, propping her head in her arms, hand still grasping Harry's.

Her dreams were jumbled and unintelligible, the only thing she could really remember was the fact that Harry was in it, and that flying saucers and light sabres featured heavily. The sleep however was brief, and what seemed like seconds later, although hours of dreaming had passed, she awoke, looking around quickly to see if anyone had spotted her yet.

And then her eyes fell back on Harry.

Tears began to splash down her cheeks and she didn't have the energy, or the desire to stop them or brush them away. She held onto his hand tightly because, magician or alien or whatever, Harry was still the most important thing to her in the world and she didn't think she could cope with losing him.

"Do you hear me Harry?" she whispered, brushing his fringe off his forehead and studying his face, "Everything's going to be alright...just like you always say, it's going to be ok."

She pulled her chair closer and picked gave his hand a gentle squeeze in the hope that somewhere, somehow he might feel it. However, his hand was limp and unresponsive and she choked back a sob as she realised the full extent of what was happening. He was critical, she was so close to loosing him that she didn't want to even think about it. He just lay there, all lines and drip bags of blood and clear liquids, needles in his arms and tubes down his throat, stitches, bandages and plaster casts.

"What did they do to you..." she whispered again, voice muffled with tears, "Why do this? I don't understand what you've done to make them want to do this to you..."

She buried her face in his blanket, full of the weariness and pain with no one to help or comfort her.

Crack

She barely registered the loud noise the first time, assuming it had come from the hall.

Crack...Crack

This time she did, and all the hairs on the back of her neck stood on end, she recognised that sound - it was them again. As if in a dream, and moving so slow she seemed to be underwater, she stood up, pulling her hand out of Harry's to survey the scene. Three people had appeared from nowhere, shrouded in cloaks with their wands pointing at her.

Crack

"Je-sus!" she yelled, stumbling backwards.

A fourth person had appeared at the foot of the bed and her heart exploded in terror - it was them, the hooded people, they'd come back, they'd found them again.

"Stay away!" she shouted at them trying to sound as threatening, "don't you come any closer! I'll scream for help!"

She felt defenceless against these four magicians, able to do nothing else but hold out her hand warningly. Three of them began to lower their hoods and she was greeted by sombre, grim faces.

"Catherine Earl?" asked one, a pale faced man with greying hair.

"I mean it! You come any closer I'll scream!" she cried, seeing him move towards them slightly.

He halted in his tracks and held up his hands. This threw her slightly.

"Oh Remus, look at him," said one of them sadly, and Kitty looked quickly over to her before darting her gaze back to the first man.

She shifted her posture slightly, feeling dazed and confused through the terror she'd first felt.

"There's no need to be scared," said the man they'd called Remus in a soothing voice, "we're Harry's friends, we've come to get him."

"Do you think I'm gonna believe you!" she cried, desperately wishing she had some kind of weapon with which she could defend him with.

Then she remembered her bag was propped up the corner, with her gun...

"Please, you must understand - we're telling the truth," he said in the same calm, yet pleading manner, "we've been looking for him since you disappeared -"

"Shut up!" Kitty demanded, finding herself bordering on hysterical, "Go away!"

“Please Cathy,” said the woman, moving forward, “can you just listen-”

Kitty, seeing her edging towards her stealthily was scared into acting, there was no way she was letting them get him a second time. She grabbed the chair she had been sitting on from behind her and swung it around, throwing it at the woman, who stumbled backwards with a yell. The two other men shouted as she darted towards Harry’s bedstead, and the bright red emergency button.

“Obstruco,” came a gruff voice just as she slammed her hand on it.

With a yelp she withdrew her hand, which was still tingling with the electricity that had coursed through it suddenly.

“Work!” she yelled at it desperately.

She tried hitting it again but the same thing happened again, and again, and again. She looked over to them angrily ready to scream when she came face to face with a wall of wands pointed straight at her.

“What, you’re going to try and kill me again?” she spat out, still nursing her hand.

“We’re not here to hurt either of you,” said the calm man again, who was now standing next to the woman she’d injured.

Kitty merely stared pointedly at the wands as if to say, ‘Oh really?’

"Lower your wands," said the woman as she rubbed her arm, obviously understanding her silence.

"Not likely," came a gruff voice from the depths of the one hood that had remained pulled up.

"She's scared!" she replied irritably, "Just put it away! It's not necessary!"

The four people slowly dropped their wands and pushed them into their robes and Kitty watched unimpressed. She was stepping from foot to foot now biting her lip, still trying to shield Harry from them. One of them, a tallish man with flaming red hair, attempted to walk around the other side of the bed.

"Don't!" she yelled harshly, pointing an accusatory finger at the man.

"Arthur," cautioned the first man.

"Listen Cathy-" began the girl in a gentle voice.

"Go away!" she said, anxiously hovering at the bedside.

"We're not going to do that Cathy," she said slowly yet resolutely, looking towards the other men, "we're here to help Harry."

"No you're not, I know who you are!" she said, feeling the tears beginning to well up, "but you can't have him, so piss off!"

"Listen Cathy," said the girl, encouraging smile on her face, "My name is Tonks, I'm a sort of policewoman ok? And this is Remus Lupin, Harry's dad's best friend," the man with greying hair gave her a nod of the head, "the other man's name is Alastor Moody, he's also a policeman, and this is Arthur Weasley, Harry's best friend's dad."

The ginger haired man smiled at her warmly.

"You're all magicians aren't you?" she demanded hoarsely, accusatory tone still present in her voice.

"We're all witches and wizards yes," she said in a soothing voice as if this was to make the news any easier to handle.

Kitty gave a choked sob, her heart still beating madly.

"Can you tell us what happened Cathy?" asked the man introduced as Arthur, voice warm and full of sympathy.

"I'm not gonna talk to you!" she sobbed desperately, "Leave us alone! We don't want you here! Go away!"

"Stun her," came a flat voice from inside the raised hood.

"Moody!" snapped Remus as Kitty gave a horrified start.

"We haven't got time for the waterworks," he replied, "Potter needs to see a Healer right now."

"She's the only one who knows what's happened to him Mad-Eye," barked Tonks.

"Listen, Cathy," said Arthur gently, "I know you've been through a lot, and that you're very frightened right now, but we're Harry's friends, do you understand? He's best friends with my son, Ron Weasley - Harry must have talked about him?"

She shook her head mutely, mind still screaming at her that they were going to stun her, whatever that meant.

"Oh," he said, looking slightly confused, "well...er...my son's Harry best friend. And we look after Harry sometimes during the holiday...We even took him to watch the Quidditch once, great game, Ireland won-"

"Arthur!" barked the hooded man, "enough."

Kitty stared at them mutely, unaware that she was shaking uncontrollably.

"Cathy," said the woman kindly, "Don't you recognise my voice? I spoke to you that day on your phone, when I warned you that Harry was being chased? Do you remember?"

She nodded slowly.

"Good," she said, looking pleased, "So you know we've been looking for him for a long time, and we certainly didn't want this to



happen. And now we want to make him better, can you tell us what happened to Harry, we need to know so we can help him."

"He's going to get better," she told them shakily, "he'll be awake soon! He's got plenty of morphine so you can't do anything, so go away!"

"What's morphine?" asked the ginger man blankly, looking to the others for help.

"It's a type of muggle pain relief medicine," supplied the woman, "now Cathy, you must understand that we've got our own special doctors for magical people like Harry, who'll make him better in a few hours."

"That's not possible," she whispered.

"It is," she insisted earnestly, "if you tell us what's wrong with him, I'll explain how we'll make it better."

"He's - he's had an operation," she began in a shaking voice as everyone around them flinched, "internal bleeding I guess...haemorrhage or something like that, they won't tell me...I looked at his notes though and they said they had to take out one of his kidney's-"

"Merlin's beard!" Harry's dad's friend exclaimed softly.

"Taken it out?" demanded the hooded policeman, "butchery!"

"Have they still got it?" asked Arthur hopefully.

"Go on Cathy," prompted the greying man kindly once he'd recovered.

"And they put him on a drip..."

"Drip?" asked the three all at once.

"You see that bag," said Tonks, pointing over Kitty's head, "it has fluids and medicines in it, they put it in his bloodstream through a needle and tube, you see down there, in his arm?"

The three made outraged, disbelieving comments and Kitty felt completely unbalanced - were they stupid or something?

"He's got another one for blood," she added cautiously.

"That's not good," said Tonks as the three men continued to gasp and exclaim, "that's from a blood donor, we're going to be looking at magic level dilution..."

Kitty frowned and shook her head in confusion, magic level dilution?

"Blood donor?" demanded the gruff man sounding puzzled.

"Somebody else's blood?" asked the kinder one, also looking worried.

"Yes I've heard about them," said the ginger man, looking interested despite himself, "you see, they get people to come and give pints of blood in return for a biscuit and orange squash, and then they use it-"

"Not important right now Arthur," murmured the man.

"They've cast his arm too," she said, shifting slightly so they could see Harry, "it's only a minor break they say, from the crash..."

"Crash?" the four of them demanded in unison.

"We crashed," was all she said, brandishing her own cast arm and motioning to her stitched head.

"How?" demanded the man known as Remus.

"The normal way – in a car," she snapped, and they all looked at her worriedly.

"Never mind all this - we better get him to Pomfrey," said the hooded man imperiously, "sort out this mess..."

"No! You're not moving him anywhere!" said Kitty desperately, sensing she'd let her guard down too much, "I don't care if you are Harry's goddamn friends, I still don't trust you."

"Please Cathy," pleaded the red-headed man, "we must get Harry to a healer, they can mend his broken arm in a second, replace his kidney and get rid of all these stitches..."

"You can't do that," she whispered in disbelief, "mend a broken arm in a second...can you do that?"

"Of course," said the woman, smiling encouragingly.

"Ron told me that in his second year of school Harry lost all the bones in one arm in a freak accident," said Arthur, bouncing on the balls of his feet at the memory, "and our healer had them back overnight."

"How do you accidentally lose all the bones-" Kitty began faintly.

"That's not important right now," reminded Alastor.

"He's too ill to move," she told them, moving closer to the bed and placing a hand on top of Harry's, as if this would make it impossible for them to take him.

"We can move him," Alastor said.

"No you can't," she told him loudly and angrily, "he'll die if you move him, do you understand!"

"He'll die if he stays here," he retorted fiercely and Kitty felt unbalanced, "your medicine won't work on him."

"Well you're not using your stuff on him, who knows what'll happen!" she said, wishing she could shake Harry awake right there and then.

"Cathy, we can have him up and awake by this time tomorrow," said Remus kindly, "and that's what you want right?"

"Yes," she whispered, heart squeezing painfully, "of course."

"And that's what we want," he reassured her, "we've been worried sick..."

"But he..." she began to say, her mind getting all tangled up and confused, "he doesn't want you...he left because of..."

"Harry didn't leave because of his friends Cathy," the girl said in a quiet voice, "there's a lot more to this story than you know. But right at this moment it's not important, what is important is that Harry was seriously ill and we need to make him better – that's what you want isn't it?"

"Y-yes," she whispered uncertainly, looking over at Harry momentarily.

"So, do you give us permission to take him?" asked Arthur.

She felt trapped, unable to take the responsibility for this huge decision, there was no way she could lose him though. What if they were right and the doctors here couldn't do anything for him, that he'd die because she couldn't make the right decision.

"Cathy, we have to take him," said the woman imploringly, "or he's going to die..."

Kitty stared at her for a moment before stepping down slightly.

"Ok..."

"Excellent," she said, moving forwards instantly.

"But he's going nowhere without me," Kitty told them quickly, "I'm not having you whisking him off to some random place where I don't know."

"No way," said the gruff policemen quickly.

“You have to! I’m not leaving him! And we’re murder suspects now!”

“Murder?”

“Because of last night!” she said, feeling suddenly very sick.

She wasn’t just a suspect, she was a murderer.

“She’s coming Moody,” said the woman with an air of finality, “we need to know. Tell Vance to sort the police out too.

“I’m coming?” Kitty demanded hoarsely.

"Of course you’re coming, you must trust us Cathy," Remus told her.

"That's not going to happen and you know it."

Everyone stared at her for a few moments, either unsure of whether this was a yes or a no, or that they had just begun to assess her and found something wrong. Either way she didn’t like it and she wouldn’t let them do anything to Harry without her seeing it first.

Kitty had always imagined herself as a very strong person, not easily scared or bothered by things that went on around her. But today, today she was terrified. The magicians had been all sweetness and kindness to her, going about their extraordinary business as if nothing untoward was happening. They had flown...no that wasn't the right word, they had arrived outside a massive wrought iron gate, rusting and falling off its hinges, after only a second before being in the hospital room. She didn't understand it - how was that possible? It really was like the transporters in Star Trek, proper beam me up Scotty, instant travelling through space in a matter of seconds.

Either that or they’d drugged her – made her think she’d travelled in a second...

Everyone steadied themselves slightly and Kitty tried to push her way to Harry’s side, trembling with horror as she saw he was floating mid air with no visible way for this to happen.

“Get out of the way,” came a gruff voice, pushing her aside as Harry went ahead.

Frightened into silence she couldn't even summon a rebuke and trailed after them as they swept through the dilapidated gates and her gaze fell upon a massive castle ahead. It was a ramshackle place, broken glass windows, arches crumbling away into the ground, gardens tangled and wild with neglect.

Strangely though, they continued towards the ruin as if it were their destination and she notice a Government sign lounging in some tall grass.

Access to this area is strictly prohibited by order of the Ministry of Works.

A sudden wave of uneasiness washed over her and she took in the ruined building, then the cloaks ahead of her.

Another sign flashed past her as they hurried onwards.

Private property.

Keep out - trespassers will be prosecuted.

Kitty frowned deeply at this, before another one was visible off to her right.

Danger - This building is unsound and potentially hazardous.

She stopped following them - they weren't supposed to be here, it was dangerous. She was almost turning around to walk back towards the safety to the iron gate when the sudden realisation that they were taking Harry into this ruin, not a hospital, hit her.

“Stop!” she yelled suddenly.

The assembled group seemed not to hear her, muttering between themselves.

“OI! STOP!”

She ran forward and pushed through them to get to Harry.

“What’s wrong?” asked the woman as they all stared at her.

“Where are you taking him?” she cried, trying to pull Harry backwards from his strange exorcist pose.

“To the castle,” replied the greying man as Harry remained firmly where he was.

“You can’t go in there!” Kitty said angrily, “You lied! You said you were taking him to the hospital!”

“We are,” the woman said soothingly, “it’s inside the castle.”

“Give him back!” Kitty said desperately trying to pull Harry still, “You lied, there is no hospital! You think this is funny! Taking him away to some crappy old ruin to die!”

They all stared at her in open mouthed shock for a seconds before the greying man suddenly gave a small smile.

“Do you think this is funny!” she nearly screeched, “You’re sick!”

“No, I’m sorry,” he said, face carefully arranged now, “you’re under the influence of a powerful anti-muggle charm that on this castle - makes you think you can only see a ruin? Want to follow the signs back to safety?”

Kitty nearly agreed before she gave a disgusted scoff.

“Yeah right! I’m not falling for your tricks.”

“It’s true Cathy, one small spell and you’ll be able to see where we’re really going,” said the woman, brandishing her wand.

“Don’t you dare!” she really did scream this time, trying to shrink away from the threat.

“I’m not going to hurt you,” she replied, looking upset at her reaction, “I just want to-”

“Retego.”

The voice came out of nowhere and they all looked up to see the only one of the cloaked figures that had collected her that hadn’t lowered his hood; the policeman.

“We’re wasting time,” was all he said, “carry on.”

Kitty was about to protest when she looked up, eyes drawn in a sort of horrified trance towards the ruin. Only it wasn’t a ruin anymore, it was an elegant medieval castle, full of towers, lead paned windows, sweeping manicured lawns - and all its walls intact. She stumbled backwards so much that she tripped over and sat, sprawled forgotten on the floor as she stared up at the sudden hallucination.

He’d done something to her, that hooded policeman, he’d used magic on her!

Feeling suddenly dirty and contaminated she tried to wipe the magic away, brushing her skin with her hands frantically. But when she finished and looked up, it was with a creeping horror that she saw the castle was still there, still perfect...

Taking a deep gulp of air she scrambled to her feet and chased after the others, who were far ahead now. She clutched her ribs, which were screaming with pain and they had entered the castle through a pair of huge oak doors and practically ran down the stone corridors, until they’d entered what Kitty would loosely term a 'hospital'. Harry had been placed on a bed and a bustling lady had appeared instantly by his side, wand out.



They had to forcibly remove Kitty after a few minutes, such was the volume of her yells and protests at seeing Harry being threatened again. They'd tried to explain that she was helping, but she didn't believe them for a second and now she was sitting on the side of one of the beds at the other end of the room, desperately craning her neck to see what was happening. All she could see were the various forms lit up by sudden flashes of light and illuminations that were emanating from their wands.

However, when she finally looked around her settings, it began to dawn on her that things were not right. Suddenly, she felt as if she was being watched and she turned, eyes drawn to a large painting on the wall. She was sure the eyes had moved. She squinted at it closer, it was an oil of a rather ugly looking man covered in warts and she looked into his eyes, feeling a shiver chase down her spine.

The man in the painting winked at her suddenly.

"Je-sus Christ!" yelled Kitty, reeling back and falling off the bed and into the cupboard.

It rattled precariously for a few seconds and then also clattered to the floor, sending the fruit bowl and jug of water crashing to the ground.

The man in the painting began to chuckle, pointing and laughing at her.

She swore loudly, scrambling backwards desperately, trying to get away from the horror of the situation, but found herself crawling among the debris of the fallen cupboard. She couldn't pull her eyes away from the painting, it was like seeing a car crash, there was some kind of morbid fascination in this thing that caused her such terror.

"Don't be frightened," came a kind voice from beside her suddenly, "he likes to tease newcomers..."

"But he's a painting!" stammered Kitty, looking across to the speaker.

She only lasted one second of absolute horrified silence before she began to scream.

Remus and Tonks had been supervising Harry's treatment when the screaming had started and had both jumped out of their skins. Everyone in the room had turned to look at the source of the noise in panic.

"Oh no," moaned Tonks, rushing over to the girls aid.

"Carry on with Harry!" Remus demanded over his shoulder as he hurried over to the bed.

Tonks was already ushering the Grey Lady away, who looked hurt and tearful as she vanished into the far wall. Remus crouched down in front of Kitty, who had her back pressed up against the wall, trying to hide under the bed. She was swearing quickly in the kind of voice that would usually be associated to the mad ramblings of the insane and had her arms wrapped around her head protectively.

"Cathy?" said Remus gently, "Are you ok?"

"No I'm not ok!" she shrieked at once, tears choking her voice as she tried to push herself further into the wall.

"Try not to be frightened," he said, trying to reassure her inexpertly.

She began to rock backwards and forwards, crying into her arms, taking deep shuddering gasps. Remus shot a look at Tonks who looked stricken, they both had no idea how to explain to a muggle about ghosts.

"That was a-a ghost!" she sobbed loudly, "a f-fucking ghost! I could s-see right through i-i-it!"

"She won't harm you Cathy," tried Remus, "they can't even touch anything-"

"The paintings move!" she accused, tears still in her voice, "ghosts walk through the walls! We transported here in the blink of an eye! It was a ruin! You can hurt people without even touching them!"

Tonks and Remus shared an anxious, yet significant look.

"I've got to get out of here," she said suddenly, her voice full of panic, "you're all crazy, I must be going mad..."

"Just get some rest and you'll-"

Began Tonks worriedly before giving an exclamation of surprise, Kitty had jumped out of her hiding place and quickly side stepped them, racing off down the hospital wing.

"Stop!" yelled Tonks running after her, "Cathy!"

But she didn't stop, she merely pushed herself faster, passing Harry and the group crowded around his bed towards the door.

"Stop her!" yelled Remus as the group watched her in shock.

She grabbed a trolley of bottles in the aisle and threw it into the path of those that were chasing her, who crashed into it and went sprawling to the ground. She became aware of people shouting instructions to each other, but none of that mattered, all that she knew now was that she had to get out, away from all these unnatural, evil things. She had to find somewhere to hide until she could figure out how to rescue Harry. She was out the door and into the corridor, heading for the entrance way and the massive double doors and she could hear them all behind her.

"Stop!"

"Cathy!"

Suddenly out of the corner of her eye she saw someone lurch towards her and she turned to see it wasn't a person - it was a suit of armour. She screamed loudly, yelling herself hoarse as she pulled out from its grasp, kicking and punching at the hard, cool metal for freedom. She managed to pull free and it clattered to the floor and she tried to run again, but her ribs were hurting too much and her head was pounding, the terror was making it hard for her to think, to

make any sort of plan and now she was lost. She couldn't find the doors, here there were only rough stone walls, no windows, just torches and brackets and cold...

"And what do we have here?" demanded a silkily voice suddenly.

Someone grabbed her by the wrist, someone she hadn't seen lurking in the shadows and was wrenched to a halt mid-run. Kitty filled her lungs and screamed, going on and on until she had no more breath as she fought tooth and nail to get free, which incidentally were her only weapons. The man was shouting at her, voices were echoing around the corridor and she was dimly aware that her wrist hurt.

"Stop screaming!" yelled the man, sounding torn between furious and frantic as she began to swear.

"Let me go! Let me go! LET ME GO! LET ME GO!" she raged, fist connecting with some part of the man, who gave a grunt and let her go.

She stumbled backwards and turned to run, smacking instead into someone's chest. She looked up to see a deformed face staring grimly down at her, scars cutting across the flesh, pieces of which were missing. An electric blue eye bulged out at her, spinning madly. She began to scream again, backing away in horror at the awful sight.

The last thing she remembered before the nothing took over, was the word 'stupefy' being roared somewhere in the corridor.

"Mad-Eye!" cried Tonks furiously, rushing over to Kitty who had hit the floor with a loud thump, "what do you think you're doing!"

"She was hysterical," he said simply, looking neither apologetic nor concerned for Kitty's welfare.

"Well whose fault is that!" she demanded, "setting the armour on her!"

"I take it this is the illusive Cathy," asked Snape with obvious distaste as he looked down at the girl.

"As a matter of fact it is," replied Tonks tartly, "and thank you for scaring the living daylights out of her - thank you all in fact, brilliant job! There goes our chance of ever having her trust us."

"Why does she need to trust us?" asked Moody, also kneeling down at the girls side now, "if you trust someone you leave yourself open to attack! Besides, she's going to be obliterated soon anyway so it doesn't matter."

"What?" demanded Tonks in disbelief, "says who?"

"Say's me," he replied, looking at her as if she was stupid, "you don't think we were going to let her wander off knowing all about not only the Order, but Hogwarts, Death Eaters, You-Know-Who, magic?"

"Well, I," stuttered Tonks, before snapping her mouth closed and thinking, "I didn't think we'd decided anything yet..."

"We ought to get her to the hospital wing," cut in Snape, staring down at the girl, "she's gone very pale."

"Probably terrified for her life," muttered Tonks, summoning a stretcher and leading her down the corridor.

Moody and Snape followed her at a reasonable distance, allowing her to storm ahead, dragging Kitty into the hospital wing, which was abuzz with noise and commotion. Remus had been injured falling over the trolley Kitty had pushed in their path and was holding a towel to his forehead while Madam Pomfrey was busy casting spells over Harry and shouting instructions to various people to fetch potions or salves. It seemed half the Order and Hogwarts teaching staff had turned up. Just when Tonks didn't think the place could get anymore hectic, almost the entire Weasley clan arrived.

They were led by Mrs Weasley, who was in full stride, face chalk white save for two tiny splotches of pink in the cheeks, closely followed by Ron and Ginny, who looked just as anxious, Fred and George, who looked strangely grim without the usual grins and Bill and Charlie, who were deep in discussion with two other wizards. The massive group of witches and wizards swarmed about the room,

talking loudly between each other and demanding news as Ron and Ginny tried to push through. However the room suddenly became hushed as Tonks tried to pull Kitty through the crowd to a bed. They parted before her, all staring down and trying to get a good look at the girl they'd all come to know as Cathy, or Our Girl, and who, they believed, was responsible for Harry's disappearance.

It couldn't have been a good introduction for her, their opinion of her was amazingly low to start with, and now all they saw was the limp form of a battered and bruised girl, pale faced and black-eyed. Mrs Weasley surveyed her with a stony look in her eyes, and Ron, who was standing next to her, was watching her with an unreadable expression, mouth hanging slightly open.

Ginny was clinging onto his arm as she stared hard at her.

"That's her!"

The whispers started and Tonks tried to ignore what they were saying, finally managing to get through the crowd. She took Kitty to a bed far away from the rest, laying her down and pulling the curtains around the bed, shielding the curious, if not accusatory, stares. She placed an enchanted sleep charm on the girl and with a flick of her wand changed the unconscious girl into a hospital robe, pulling the blanket over her. She stood back and surveyed the girl worriedly, unconsciously biting her nails. A moment later someone walked around the curtains and stood next to her.

"What happened?" asked the newcomer, sounding worried, "why did she come in unconscious?"

"Mad-Eye stunned her," replied Tonks stiffly, "oh Remus, you should have seen her...he sent one of the suits of armour after her and, well, you can imagine how she reacted to that...Then Snape caught up with her and she punched him, then ran smack bang into Mad-Eye...Imagine seeing that face if you were a muggle...Its bad enough for some wizards."

"Maybe it's best to let her sleep for a while then, she's had a big shock..." he said, smoothing down a few rumples in Kitty's quilt.

"No thanks to us," she said bitterly, "we should have thought about this a little bit harder...bringing a muggle into Hogwarts! I mean the paintings, ghosts, armour, staircases...it's enough to freak anyone out..."

"I suppose all we can do is wait and see now is how she is when she wakes up," said Remus, "figure out the next course of action."

"Mad-Eye reckons its obliviation," she said neutrally.

"That would be the sensible option," he said.

"Yes, that would be sensible," agreed Tonks.

There was an uneasy silence.

"But you don't agree with that do you?" she said flatly, sensing his reluctance.

"I don't think Harry would agree with that, or her," he said, a look of intense worry on his face, "or me..."

"Me neither," she said, feeling an anxious knot twist in her stomach, "it's just, if she's obliviated then she'll forget all about Harry. It's not good for him because he'll be devastated, and it's not good for her because not only have we stopped her loving someone, we've also resigned her back to a life of abuse and, and pain!"

Remus nodded along in total agreement. In the background they could hear Mrs Weasley's commanding voice booming to her children to keep quiet and out the way and the hustle and bustle of all the gathered witches and wizards.

"And plus..." began Tonks hesitantly, before taking a deep breath and ploughing on, "and plus I like her. I know, I know I shouldn't because of her terrible past and her behaviour and running away with Harry and everything...but, I just think she's misunderstood, you know? She's had a hard life, no ones ever given her a chance I'd bet, but now with Harry...I don't know..."

"...maybe she's a different person?" finished Remus and Tonks was relieved to find he thought the same as her.

"Exactly," she said emphatically, "I just feel so sorry for her...what must her and Harry have been through? How did he get like this? How did she get him to the hospital? Where did they go? Why does she love him? Why does he love her? They're polar opposites as far as I can see!"

"Looks can be deceiving," said Remus finally, "you know that."

"Too right," she muttered, "and now everyone in there hates her..."

"Let not worry about it right now," said Remus gently, leading Tonks out of Kitty's enclosed ward, "let's worry about Harry and his new kidney..."

AN/ Grins wickedly> How do you like it so far? I tell you what, it is SO much fun writing magic from a muggle point of view! You get that added dimension of 'what-the-hells-going-on' that is easily explained in magic-centric fics!

Thanks for ALL my reviews, especially all of you that love Kitty - I'm glad you like her, I've intentionally written her so that sometimes it's very hard to see why anyone would like her lol. And we all know there's nothing like a bit of angst to dwell on - mine s currently 70 page projects about 'managing the historic environment' lol.

THANKS!



## Chapter Twenty One

No one knows what it's like,  
To feel these feelings,  
Like I do,  
And I blame you.

Kitty knew she was dreaming, but it didn't seem to make it any easier, any better. She felt trapped inside it, unable to wake up until her own mind had tortured her sufficiently. She was back in the graveyard, back seeing those spells being thrown at Harry, watching him being thrown through the air like a toy, writhing on the floor as if he were being tortured by some unseen hand. And then there was those red eyes, filling her vision, staring down at her with disgust and contempt, feeling like he was inside her head. As if just looking at her was dragging up all the most suppressed, horrific memories of her life.

"Do you know what I am...what your dear Harry is?"

She could feel her heart pounding against her ribs and the hot, prickling sweat breaking out across her body, but still she couldn't seem to wake herself up. She could just see him, see Harry collapsing to the ground, blood spreading out from his stomach, the priest falling down dead, staring at her.

"I'm going to get you...Kitty...I'm going to enjoy watching you suffer...and then I'll get Harry."

Kitty jerked out of her nightmare now, gasping and sitting bolt upright as she clutched her blanket to her. She could help but let the horrified tears escape as she tried to take shuddering breaths, desperately wanting to banish those red eyes from her mind's eye, stop herself from being able to smell the blood, the damp grass, the musty church...

As she slowly began to calm down she looked around her and was greeted by the site of Hogwarts hospital wing and she felt the realisation hit her once more - she was here...it wasn't some horrible nightmare...it wouldn't finish when she woke up...

She gritted her teeth and furiously wiped her damp face dry, anger creeping through her fear. She'd just remembered what had happened to her yesterday, they'd brought her and Harry here, they'd chased her...one minute she was fighting that black haired man and the next...she was waking up back in her bed...

Magic, whispered her mind, they did it to you again.

She glared at the bedcovers in the early morning light, hating them even more now. How dare they do that to her! How dare they bring her here, then not even explain what was happening! No one had even bothered to tell her why this had all happened, what they were, what they were doing!

She reached over to her bedside table and pulled her backpack towards her, wincing at the pain in her ribs which seemed to lie heavy on chest. She rooted through it for a moment before pulling out her notebook/sketchpad and pencil, flipping it open and balancing it on her knees.

She drew a number one in a circle and thought for a moment, and then wrote the words Magic exists next to it. She paused and looked at it, that still didn't make it seem more real. But she continued to list what she knew.

- 1) Magic exists
- 2) Harry is a magician
- 3) Magicians tried to kill Harry and me
- 4) Tom Riddle is a magician
- 5) He'll try again
- 6) Are magicians aliens?
- 7) School for teaching magic - loads of them?

8) Harry will be awake today

9) I'm a murder suspect

10) I'm a murderer

She stopped now and stared at her list, face expressionless to anyone that would be observing. She didn't know how that made her feel, she may have killed people...but they were going to kill her and Harry. That was more important, wasn't it? That was self-defence. She shook the thoughts away from her head and looked back down to her list. After a moment she picked up the pen again and wrote in big, bold letters across the bottom of the page.

Harry is a magician.

Harry can do magic.

Harry lied to me. About everything.

Who is Harry?

Some hours later, when the sun was up and the birds were singing outside, Remus walked into the Hospital Wing, having just travelled from Hogsmeade. The Matron was stood at Harry's bedside and he walked over eagerly, already composing in his mind what he was going to say to Harry first - he would be considerate, sympathetic but firm.

"Good morning Madam Pomfrey," said Remus as he joined her, "how is he?"

"I'm not quite sure," said the woman after a few moments, looking slightly perturbed, "I'm going to need some more time..."

"Oh..." he said in confusion, placing his bag at the side of Harry's bed and looking at him closely.

His skin was deathly white and his expression was completely blank, it hadn't looked like he'd even woken up yet. One look at the Matron's tired eyes and fatigued air was enough to tell him that was exactly the case. Harry must have been more ill than she'd previously thought and this was not good news at all.

"He's essentially healed," she began anxiously, "his kidney is still work in progress, but the stomach wounds, cuts and breaks are fine...He just, won't wake up...just yet..."

"I see," said Remus, feeling slightly lost, "do you know why?"

"Not as such..." she replied, looking uncomfortable, "I need more time."

"Of course."

"I'll just go and see where that breakfast has got to," said the Matron, hurrying off and leaving Remus to ponder.

He sat down on one of the chairs and leant forward, deep in thought as he tried to remember what he could about muggle medicine. However, his knowledge stretched as far as plasters and stitches, not surgery and internal bleeding and Harry's condition was a complete mystery to him – he couldn't even understand why he was still alive.

Had Voldemort really failed to kill him again? It seemed the ever increasing complexity of his plans did nothing towards the actual effectiveness of them. But what had saved him this time? His attention was suddenly caught by Madam Pomfrey, who was walking over to the bed a few rows down from Harry's with a plate of food. She placed it on the table and said a few words to the girl. Remus watched Kitty stare impassively ahead of her, completely blanking the existence of the Matron and he felt another deep sense of foreboding.

After a few moments, Remus got up and walked over to Kitty's bed. He noticed with a slight frown she still had the plaster cast on her arm and bruises all over her face and wondered why Madam Pomfrey hadn't healed her yet. She had her back against the wall and was

staring ahead of her with a dull expression in her eyes, almost as if she wasn't even there at all.

“Did you sleep well Cathy?” he asked kindly after she didn't acknowledge his appearance.

She remained completely silent and Remus stared at her thoughtfully, before trying again.

“Cathy, did you sleep ok?”

Again the dull eyes were trained straight ahead and her lips remained firmly sealed and Remus had the eerie feeling that he wasn't even there at all, that was how good at ignoring him she was.

“Can I get you anything?” he tried, already knowing it wouldn't work.

She was completely silent and Remus gave a slight sigh.

“I'll be over here if you need anything,” he said, gesturing over to Harry's bed.

When the response he was waiting for didn't come, he gave another deep sigh and walked away. Kitty obviously hadn't recovered from the shock of everything that had happened to her in the past few days and yesterday's escape attempt obviously hadn't helped. He gave a look at his watch, Tonks wouldn't be here for a good few hours yet and Remus felt she would be the only one who might be able to make any sort of contact with Kitty.

When she finally did arrive Remus was just finishing off talking to Madam Pomfrey who seemed to be even more worried than she had been that morning and he got the distinct feeling that she was completely mystified as to why Harry hadn't woken up yet.

“How is he?” she asked as she approached the bedside.

“No change,” said Remus, getting up as she stood around the opposite side of the bed, looking at Harry.

She was quiet for a moment and Remus recognised the look of worry and guilt as one she used often during the whole Harry fiasco.

“Madam Pomfrey’s doing all she can,” he said as Tonks flopped down in the chair wearily, “if any one can get him better, it’s her.”

Tonks nodded heavily and silence descended upon the two. They both watched Harry for some time and Remus caught Tonks chewing on a lock of hair, something he recalled Charlie teasing her for – an old habit apparently. He continued to watch her, noticing for the first time it was possible to chart her thoughts quite easily by the expressions on her face, right now there seemed to be flickers of something – guilt and grief and he knew somehow she was going over the mistakes she thought she’d made that had caused this.

She closed her eyes wearily for a moment, and he was struck at how tired she looked all of a sudden, the blonde ponytail making her face look drawn and pale.

“Tired?” he observed, causing her eyes to snap open instantly.

“I’m fine,” she said, sitting up in the chair and fixing him with a weak smile.

“What’s been happening today?” he asked, noticing she looked more weary than the usual.

“Still cleaning up the mess of this whole breakout ordeal, I heard someone talking about reinstating the death penalty like I said,” she said, leaning back in her chair and stifling a yawn, “God knows what’ll happen now...I tell you what, Fudge just can’t last anymore.”

“Why, what’s going on?”

“Well, nothings actually been said but the whole place is buzzing, literally. We’ve got rumours flying all over the place that say next few days at the latest...” she yawned before cursing herself quietly, “Merlin’s sake, why do I keep yawning! Anyway, they’ve out everyone

on overtime covering up certain things, trying to suppress the press...”

“The Prophets stirring up trouble?” he asked, not feeling particularly surprised.

“Yes, and guess who their totting as their new Minister of choice?” she said with a laugh, “only Rufus Scrimgeor!”

Remus raised his eyebrows in surprise, “Really?”

“Yeah - Talk about swapping a mouse for a lion,” she said, before giving another wide yawn, “the people want a fighter according to Ruby Goldwing’s latest article.”

“Well they’ll certainly get that with an ex-Auror,” he said, musing on the news for a few more minutes.

She nodded heavily, giving yet another yawn and propping her chin on her hand to keep herself sitting upright. Remus finally noted this and after studying her face for a few moments carefully worded his statement.

“You look a bit tired Tonks.”

“Didn’t really get much sleep last night,” she stated and as she spoke she changing the colour and length of her to a bright red bob, “there we go, much brighter.”

“Changing you’re hair won’t make you feel less tired, you know,” he pointed out and she merely laughed, “how much sleep did you get?”

“Does half an hour sleeping on my desk count?” she joked.

“Are you actually being serious by masking the truth with jokes?” he laughed right back, shaking his head pitifully.

“Ah, once again my cunning plan has been foiled,” she said, before giving them game away with another great yawn.

He shook his head slightly and looked at Harry again. As much as he'd grown up since he'd first seen him, now, lying here, pale and ill, he looked just as young as all those years ago. He wondered vaguely why he hadn't woken up yet before looking over to Tonks to see her frowning at Harry too.

“Maybe you should go and get some rest,” he suggested kindly, “Harry's not waking up anytime soon.”

“I said I'm fine, stop fussing,” she said, almost irritably.

“I'm sorry,” he apologised at once.

“No, sorry, that was a bit uncalled for,” she apologised almost instantly.

He nodded slightly.

“Anyway, I best see Cathy – how's she been today?”

He gave a slight frown at her conversation change but joined her in looking across to the girl. Kitty was still sitting up against the wall in exactly the same position as when he'd last seen her that morning, eyes still trained across the other side of the room and arms wrapped around her knees.

“Well that pretty much describes how she's been today,” he said, the ominous feeling from previously increasing more now, “I think she must still be in shock. She just been sitting and staring since I saw her this morning and Madam Pomfrey says she hasn't eaten since she got here.”

“Perhaps she's still injured, has anyone checked?” asked Tonks, rising instantly.



“She won’t let us come any near her with a wand,” he told her as they crossed the hospital wing, “we were going to heal her broken arm and her head...”

They approached the bed and again, Kitty showed no sign of even recognising they were there.

“Wotcher Cathy,” she Tonks, sitting on the edge of the bed as she fixed a warm smile on the girl, “how are you feeling today?”

Kitty blinked slowly but other than that there was no sign of her movement.

“Cathy?” she tried again, “Can you tell me if you’re hurt?”

Remus realised already they were fighting a losing battle but Tonks was almost as stubborn as the girl in front of them.

“What did they do to you at the hospital?” she pressed on.

Remus was watching Kitty closely and he noticed her knuckles were white with the pressure of the grip her arms had on her knees. Tonks must have noticed this too because she shuffled a little closer and placed a consoling hand upon the bed clothes.

“Cathy?” she continued, “Have you got any injuries? Do you feel sick?”

Kitty gave a snort under her breath which caused both of them to jump and she rolled her eyes so they were facing away from them.

“Are you hurt?” Remus asked now, beginning to become worried by her silence.

“Cathy, we just want to help you,” pleaded Tonks, “let us heal you...”

Kitty looked across to them slowly and fixed Tonks with a steady look, as if she were trying to figure her out. Tonks tried to maintain a calm

look and she stared back at the girl, desperate to show she meant no harm.

“Please, you’ve got to trust us Cathy,” Tonks said in a quiet voice.

Kitty blinked slowly and they could both see and reply marching towards the conversation.

“Fuck you,” said Kitty slowly, causing both Remus and Tonks to jump.

“I’m sorry?” asked Tonks blankly, obviously taken aback by Kitty’s rudeness.

“You heard me,” she replied, fixing her gaze back ahead of herself firmly.

“Cathy, we’re trying to help you here,” said Tonks pleadingly, “you’ve got to trust us, ok?”

“No,” she said simply, “I don’t have to trust you and I’m not going to trust you, so why don’t you just save your breath, piss off and leave me alone, ok?”

Tonks looked momentarily speechless at Kitty’s disrespect and Remus sighed slightly, laying a hand on her shoulder, “Come on, let’s leave her to cool down a bit, everyone’s just tired.”

“Cathy,” pleaded Tonks, leaning forwards as if Remus hadn’t spoken, “why won’t you trust me? I’m on your side!”

“No your not,” she spat out angrily, “you’re not on my side! Nobody here’s on my side – no ones on Harry’s side! LEAVE ME ALONE!”

“Cathy,” began Tonks, surprising Remus by sounding almost tearful, “just listen to me for a moment, Harry-”

“No you listen to me!” she shouted, sitting bolt upright and fixing Tonks with a wild eyed look, “you say you’re on my side right? Well you don’t even know what my side is! No one here cares what’s happened, what we’ve been through! You don’t even want to know! All you care about is the fact that you did good – you managed to find him – good fucking work! Did you ever stop to think maybe he didn’t want to be found!”

“There’s more to this than you know Cathy,” said Remus calmly.

“Don’t I fucking know it!” she yelled, “maybe you should take a leaf out of my book and be a bit more fucking scared! You haven’t got any idea what happened to us, what it took for us to get here!”

“Then tell us,” asked Tonks tearfully.

Kitty gave her a look of the utmost disgust and threw off the bedclothes.

“You are never going to understand,” she hissed, “so what’s the point? You’re too busy congratulating yourselves on finding him! Why don’t you just forget any ideas you had about you being brilliant detectives and wonderful friends and think with your goddamn brains for a second! Because when he wakes up and realises where he is, do you think he’s going to forgive me!”

“Cathy,” tried Remus worriedly.

But Kitty didn’t reply, she’d jumped out of bed and was now walking away from the conversation towards the doors of the Hospital Wing.

“Cathy, you must stay in here,” he said a little louder.

She paused in her tracks and Tonks and Remus stood up slowly. Tonks cast a worried look over to him and he tried to give her a comforting one back, although it came out more of a grimace. After a few moments Kitty stopped staring at Harry’s bed and turned to face them, and Tonks was taken aback by the expression on her face.

“Do you know what I promised him?” she asked in a hoarse voice, “I promised that no matter what happened – I wouldn’t let you take him, I promised that. I said I’d rather die than hurt him, and look how long it took me – less than a day!”

“You did the right thing Cathy, Harry needed our help,” said Tonks.

“The right thing for who? Not for him, not for us...” she said fiercely, “Just look at what he was prepared to do for me...and what I’ve done for him...”

“He’ll thank you Cathy,” said Remus, “you saved his life.”

Kitty stared at him hard and he could see she was thinking of a thousands things and unable to say one.

“What kind of life is this?” she finally cried, throwing her arms up to gesture to the castle.

“Harry’s life,” he told her calmly.

She stared at him hard for a long time, evidently what he’d said was the last thing she wanted to hear.

“Oh, you are such a bastard,” she said evilly.

She gave a snort of disgust and spun around, marching out of the Hospital Wing, oblivious to Remus’ protests. He was still staring at the door in shock when he heard a mighty crash that caused them both to jump.

“There goes the armour,” he said after a few moments before hearing another crash, “and the next one...”

He turned to Tonks, unable to hide his shock any longer.

“What do you think that was all about?” he asked, almost laughing at the absurdity of it all.

However, when he caught sight of Tonks he realised she was far from laughing.

“Tonks?” he asked, caught off-guard again.

“Do you think she really means that?” she asked in a slightly panicked voice, eyes transfixed by the doorway.

“That I’m a bastard?” he joked, “I hope not.”

“She hates us,” she said tearfully, “we did do the right thing...didn’t we? We did the right thing?”

“Tonks, we did the right thing. Cathy is tired, hurt, stressed, in shock from all this. She doesn’t mean to be like this,” he explained, even more surprised to see tears welling up in her eyes, “hey Tonks, come on, don’t let her get to you.”

“I’m not letting her get to me!” she protested, looking flustered and annoyed at herself, “but what if she’s not? And, we did this...”

She trailed off and put her face in her hands, drawing in a shaky breath.

“Tonks, are you ok?” asked Remus, tentatively putting a hand on her shoulder.

“I’ve got to go!” she exclaimed suddenly.

“What-” he began, sounding confused and worried at the same time.

However, instead of replying she merely strode off towards Harry’s bed, gathering her newly distributed things whilst trying not to cry. Remus felt completely lost and didn’t have a clue of how to handle this situation, but when she made towards the door without another word he felt had to jump into action.

“Tonks, what’s wrong with you?” he asked, rushing after her.

They reached the corridor and Tonks was practically sobbing now, tripping and stumbling over the various pieces of armour Kitty had scattered.

“Tonks!”

She didn’t stop or say anything, still struggling to put her travel cloak on whilst trying to juggle bags and navigate her way. Remus realised it couldn’t just be the way Kitty was acting that had got her so upset, something else must have happened, and she was usually so resilient that it must have been something big.

“Tonks!” he tried again as they emerged into the cool summer air.

“Stop following me!” she spluttered as she practically ran down the steps.

He stopped instantly, before shaking himself slightly and carrying on.

“You don’t look like you want to be on your own,” he tried, worrying now he’d anger her.

“Look at me!” she cried, stopping and gesturing angrily at her face, “I am crying! I am finding it hard to speak! And I just want to go home! I want to be alone!”

“What’s happened?” he asked regardless, “has something happened? Your mum-”

“Nothings wrong with my mum,” she managed to choke out, pressing the heel of her hand into her eyes, “it’s just...I...No. I want my house back, and my bed and my home, I don’t want baby’s crying and couches! I just want to sleep!”

“Tonks,” he said softly, shocked at her outburst yet feeling the same sense of pity he sometimes felt around her returning, “if that’s what’s bothering you then you can come back to the house, we’ve got beds and I can-”

“What’s bothering me?” she repeated incredulously however, “what’s bothering me! Stop looking at me in that way!”

“What way?” he asked, suddenly aware this was developing into an argument.

“Like that! With pity in your eyes!” she accused angrily, before putting on a false high-pitched voice, “oh poor Tonks, isn’t she sad, isn’t she blue, isn’t it pathetic? Hasn’t got a house, hasn’t got any money, too young to run with the big boys, too clumsy!”

“I don’t think that,” he told her sincerely.

“You do! You can’t even hide it! Well I’m sick of it!” she sobbed, “I’m sick of not being able to have what I want most in the world, I’m sick of being the joke! Of doing things wrong! I can’t help Cathy and I can’t help Harry – I can’t even help myself! Look at me, thinking I’d right my wrongs by ‘saving’ Harry, well, it hasn’t and it won’t! Everything I touch goes bad!”

“Tonks, you’ve got to listen to me,” he told her anxiously, “nobody thinks any of this, you’re putting too much pressure on yourself. You’re working yourself into the ground and look where it’s getting you!”

“Exactly,” she cried, tears flowing freely down her face, “it doesn’t matter how much work I put in, or what I try to do for you, I still manage to mess it up! Well I’m tired of it all, I just want to go to sleep and wake up as somebody else!”

“You don’t mean that,” he said, “you’re a wonderful person and everyone appreciates what you’re doing – even if they don’t show it.”

“Spare me,” she sniffed, looking almost as bad as she sounded with wild hair and red, puffy eyes, “just save it...I can’t stand fake optimism ever more than I can’t stand pity.”

“I don’t pity you,” he said in a calm manner that belied his anguish at their semi-argument, “I’m just worried about you, when you’re under so much stress, something’s got to give...Don’t do this to yourself. Come back to the house and-”

He trailed off at that moment because Tonks expression, which had been battling the tears quite unsuccessfully so far, suddenly gave way. She took a deep shuddering breath and began to sob, burying her face in her hands as he tried to figure out what have provoked such a strong reaction. Feeling even more worried now, he reached out and placed a consoling hand on her shoulder, before trying to pull her into a hug.

However at this he suddenly found his hands being batted away harshly and he reeled back in shock once again, although this time it was for a completely different reason.

“Don’t you do that,” she choked out almost angrily.

He dropped his hands to his sides heavily, unable to say anything against the words that cut deeper than he thought anyone could say to him. She spun on her heel and continued down the stairs and he watched her walk across the grounds until she passed through the gates and out of sight.

Remus sat down on the step, thinking for a long moment before rubbing his face with his hands. He couldn’t stop her words echoing in his head – don’t you do that. It was the way she’d said it, as if she wouldn’t have minded anyone else in the world being there except him.

You, she’d said, distaste in her voice. You.

Kitty made sure she was well hidden in the shadows, completely enthralled as she was at the two people’s argument in front of her. For a moment she almost forgot where she was and what had happened – intrigued as she was by the argument. Now all she wanted to know was who these people were, what had been happening to them, how they could be in love and not know what was going on with each other. The woman was quite obviously on the



edge of a complete breakdown and was saying so much personal stuff that Kitty was surprised the guy hadn't realised sooner.

She lit another cigarette, wrapping the stupid gown they'd put on her around tighter and leaned around the tall statue to see the man sitting on the steps, face in hands. Perhaps they weren't even a couple, she wondered, perhaps he hasn't got around to telling her, and that's why she's getting so hysterical. Or perhaps he already had someone...

She leaned back around the statue and after a thoughtful pause, carried on her wanderings, thinking about the woman now. She really didn't seem to be that bad she decided, she seemed to hate people pitying her and anyone seeing her weak and cry, a lot like herself in fact.

She made a pact not to be so nasty to her, it wasn't her fault after all her and Harry were here. She gave a firm nod and felt a little better about herself, before a sudden feeling that she was being watched overcame her. She instantly tensed up and she squinted towards the trees that lay ahead of her, dense and dark they formed an almost impenetrable forest metres in.

She stared into the gloom, thoughts already a million miles away in the graveyard, with the hooded cloaked men, maybe they'd come back to get Harry...

"Cathy?" came a voice and she gave a slight jump.

She turned around to see the man jogging towards her, no trace of the previous traumas on his face now.

"What?" she asked suspiciously, flicking the ash to the floor and giving a glance back towards the forest.

"You need to come inside with me now," he said, an anxious expression on his face that said he didn't want to be shouted at again.

“I’m fine out here thanks,” she said, turning around and continuing her walk towards the trees.

Maybe, if she went through the woods, she emerge into civilisation, she could get help, someone to rescue Harry...

“Don’t go in there,” he said sharply and she bristled with anger.

What right did he have telling her what to do? Purposefully now, she pushed aside a branch and began to walk in. Almost immediately she lost half her vision, so dark and oppressive the gloom was and she squinted at the floor, trying to make out a path.

“Cathy,” came the man’s voice from behind her, “please, I’m asking you nicely now, come out of here.”

“Oh, you’re asking me nicely now are you?” she muttered under her breath, pushing aside a branch a dipping into further gloom.

“Cathy?” he said more loudly now and from somewhere off to her left hand side, “Stop! Where are you?”

“Over here,” she said in a quiet sing-song voice, “over there, bet you can’t find me anywhere...”

“Listen it’s dangerous inside here,” he said, panic in his voice now, “there’s-”

“Nasty beasties?” she asked, giving a slight laugh, enjoying herself immensely now as she travelled away from his voice, “Vampires? Werewolves? Mummies? I’ve always wanted to meet those guys, ask them if they’re annoyed at the bad press.”

It was almost black now and she was having real trouble at seeing anything, even a hand in front of her, but she was having far too much fun to stop now.

“Lumos Maximus!”

Suddenly the whole forest around her was illuminated by an eerily blue light and she stopped in her tracks, she'd just noticed a spider the size of her clenched fist on the tree next to her. She peered at it closer in a kind of detached fascination – even the spiders around here were magical evidently.

“There you are,” came the man’s voice, suddenly right behind her.

“Here I am, you’re good at this game,” she said sarcastically, reaching out to prod the spider, “you’re turn to go and hide now and I’ll find you. Promise.”

“Let’s go,” was all he said.

She ignored him, too busy concentrating on the spider. She was only centimetres from touching its back when he reached out, grabbed her wrist and pulled her hand away.

“Oi!” she snarled indignantly.

“You don’t want to do that,” he said, staring into her eyes in the most unnerving fashion.

Maybe he was still beaten up from his argument earlier.

“Why not?” she asked cockily.

“Because its brothers and sisters wouldn’t like it – that’s not a spider,” he said, before dragging her by her wrist towards the direction she’d just come.

“Get your hands off me!” she yelled, wrenching out of his grip.

“Be quiet,” he shushed, “you can yell all you want when we’re out of the forest.”

She glared at him moodily, sensing for the first time that he was actually quite worried.

“Now follow me,” he said quietly, raising his wand above his head to survey the pathways – there were several to take.

She craned her neck slightly so she could see over his shoulder, watching as he lowered his wand and placed it along the palm of his hand.

“Point me,” he whispered and she couldn’t help but gasp slightly when it spun around on its own and pointed off to his far right, “this way.”

She trailed after him, being purposely slow and shuffling her feet, kicking out at the fallen branches and looking around for any sign of the dangerous creatures he seemed so worried about. However the forest was silent and there wasn’t a hint of anything interesting about. It was then as she was walking along and peering into the gloom that she saw a tall, upright column of stone. Frowning slightly in puzzlement she glanced ahead at the man and then quietly slipped off the track.

Pushing through the undergrowth she walked towards the stone, emerging at once into a clearing that was basked in moonlight. She looked up, it was almost full moon and the air in the clearing seemed to shimmer in the silvery light. The stone she’d seen was one of twelve that seemed to be positioned into a circle, the centre area completely devoid of tangled trees and bushes, instead it was covered in a thick green grass, tiny blue flowers mingled in with it. It gave the impression of a giant floral quilt.

It was a stone circle and at this realisation she frowned even more – what was a stone circle doing in the middle of a forest? As if a trance she reached forward, meaning to lay her hand on the stone, as if she would somehow find the answer within them.

“Cathy!” hissed a voice behind her and it was so full of real panic she stopped straight away.

The man was emerging out of the woods towards the clearing, anxious expression plastered over his face as he reached out and

grabbed her wrist again. This time she didn't resist, feeling somehow the stone circle was a million times more eerie than the forest. He pulled her quickly into the trees and turned to face her, expression making it plainly clear how he felt.

"Will you stop running off? I am trying to get us out of here alive and all you seem to want to do is get us killed!" he whispered angrily.

"I just wanted to see what it was," she replied, "it's not supposed to be here..."

Remus looked at her as if to ask how in the world she knew that, before his features softened. He'd quite obviously noted that she wasn't being sarcastic or defensive, but instead was looking a little unnerved.

"Come on, let's get you back to the castle," he said in a kind voice, "you've had a long day."

She nodded mutely and he beckoned her to follow him closely. They were silent for some time before Kitty spoke again.

"Who built it?"

Remus stopped and turned to her, "What?"

"Who built the circle?" she asked, voice now also hushed.

"The Centaurs built it," he said as he walked onwards, "a long time ago – before all this land belonged to Hogwarts."

"Who's Hogwarts?" she asked.

"Not who, what. Hogwarts is the name of this school – it's over a thousand years old," he said and his tone strongly reminded her of a teacher giving a class.

"Who are the Centaurs?" she asked in the same quiet voice.

“They’re magical creatures,” he said cautiously, “with the body and legs of a horse and the torso and head of a man.”

“Sagittarius,” she said.

Remus stopped and turned to look at her in wonder.

“They study the stars,” he nodded, “trying to find the mysteries of the universe, the meaning to life and to read the future.”

Kitty stared at him and he found it very difficult to guess how she felt and after a moment he turned around and continued to lead them out.

“Does it work?” she asked a little while later.

“What?” he mused, using the point me spell once more.

“Can they really see the future?” she said, voice still quietly hushed now.

“Perhaps,” he replied, “they’ve been right in the past.”

Kitty lapsed into thoughtful silence and it never occurred to Remus that her line of questioning was strange. The silence between the two was heavy in the air now and Remus wondered what she thought about what he had just said, she probably didn’t even believe him. However, all thoughts of this were pushed out of his head when he saw a break in the trees ahead and for the first time could glimpse the great castle of Hogwarts, lights shimmering in certain windows like fairy lights.

“Safe and sound,” Remus said brightly as they emerged onto the grounds, turning to Kitty again.

“Hardly,” she muttered, sidestepping him and heading for the castle.

Remus frowned after her, trying to figure out what was going on with her, before shaking his head and following.

Kitty had figured out the best way to deal with her situation was to simply ignore the magicians. If the nurse came over to question and bug her again, she'd ignore them. If any of the other various people that came in and wandered around talking came in, she'd ignore them. She figured that if they didn't talk to her, they'd give up eventually and leave her in peace and she could figure out what to do next. Most of the day she spent lying in her bed, covers pulled over her head so they'd think she was asleep. She'd use these hours of silence to think about Harry, about why he hadn't woken up yet, about magic, about the graveyard, about what the police would do to her if they ever caught up with her.

But mostly she just imagined she was talking to Harry, inventing conversations in her head that had absolutely nothing to do with magic. Usually revolving around what film they'd watch tonight, talking about what they'd done that day, what their plans for the future were. Sometime she just replayed old conversations in her head. This calmed her down somewhat and made her forget her anger for a short time, she didn't want to think about Harry the magician, because that meant thinking of the lies and the list she'd drawn out.

"So, he's completely healed?" Remus said slowly.

The Matron looked slightly lost, before nodding her head, "Yes."

"So, why is he awake yet?" he asked.

"I..." began the Matron, before shaking her head slowly, "I don't know."

"Perhaps he just needs the rest?" Bill wondered, "sometimes the body needs it? It can't be that uncommon?"

"No of course not," she replied, "but we'd expect more signs..."

"Signs?" demanded Charlie.

“More signs of life,” she said heavily, “the body asleep and resting doesn’t act like this...He’s not...responsive.”

“So he’s in a coma?” asked Bill and the others looked to him, startled, “Is that what you’re saying?”

“Not as such, because his bodies not acting right for that either...”

Remus sighed heavily and all four of them look down to Harry. Only the weak rising and fall of her chest seemed to indicate he was alive.

“I’m running all the tests I can think of,” she said firmly, as if they might somehow question her ability, “I’m consulting all the books, I’ll find something - it’s possible the muggle medicine is interfering with our magic so we may have to wait for it to clear his system.”

“Has Severus been down yet?” asked Remus, noticing Bill and Charlie share a brief glance.

“Yes, he’s tested him for everything we can think of,” said the Matron, betraying her anxiety by wringing her hands slightly, “but he’s looking into other possibilities as well, just give me some time gentlemen.”

“And what about Dumbledore, what does he think?” asked Bill, frowning slightly.

“Oh, he’ll be here tomorrow,” said the Matron, “then we’ll know more.”

Kitty was watching the huddled group standing around Harry with deep suspicion, eyeing their wands carefully for any side of danger. However, all they did was talk in low voices, looking anxious and Kitty finally looked back down at her lap glumly.

Harry still wasn’t awake.

She picked up her backpack once more and began to investigate the contents. She pushed aside the various items of dirty washing, reaching deep inside the bag until her fingers grazed cool metal. All



at once she had a flash of that night in the graveyard, hiding in the church, seeing the vicar fall to the floor, his dead eyes staring at her accusingly. You killed me, they seemed to be saying to her, if it wasn't for you, I'd be safe, at home with my family. Kitty shuddered, trying to banish the memory and she slipped her fingers into the trigger and felt the weight of the gun. It felt heavy now and the briefest wonder flashed through her mind at whether she'd killed any of those people that night.

The thought of being sixteen and being a murderer, even if it was self-defence, was more than she thought she could properly cope with. She wished Harry was there with her, that he was sitting on the bed with her, telling her not to worry, that everything was going to be alright.

It had become his saying for the last few days, as he got more worried. Whenever she was upset or unsure at what was happening, he'd be there.

"Everything's going to be alright Kitty."

She gave a slight sniff, furiously ramming the gun back into her bag as she glanced over to Harry.

"Everything's going to be alright Harry," she whispered tearfully, "I promise."

She turned back to her bag and began to look for her CD player, desperately in need of some kind of escape. She finally located it and pulled it out, laying it next to her as she reached in for her CD book. Picking out her angry music, she set up the player and put her headphones on, lying back and pressing play. Almost instantly she was tearing the earphones out as a loud, high-pitched crackling filled her ears and she practically yelped aloud at the unexpected noise. She stopped the player and spent the next five minutes tinkering around with the buttons, cleaning the lens, changing the battery and even inspecting the wiring. As far as she could see it was in perfect working order.

“Damn it,” she muttered, pushing aside her only form of entertainment and looking around hopelessly.

Harry’s bed was still surrounded and watched them for some time worriedly, Harry was supposed to have been healed as soon as they got back, that was part of the deal of her letting him come back, yet here they were on the third day and still no sign of him recovering.

She was terrified at what was wrong with him, whether he’d get better at all, whether when he did wake up she would find him different, not like him, that he would hate her for bringing him back, not speak to her...She hoped and prayed he wouldn’t, but somewhere deep down she knew that he couldn’t want to be here - what kind of life was this?

Suddenly she couldn’t stand to be in the room anymore, everything about it made her feel sick, the smell, the colour, the moving paintings, and Harry, just lying there, helpless...She slid out of bed, wincing slightly as she pulled her coat over her gown and patted her pockets, checking her cigarettes were there before strolling towards the door. She walked purposefully slowly past Harry’s bed, trying to get a good look at what the group were doing, noticing with a frown it was something to do with wands.

“Are you going outside again?” came a voice suddenly.

She gave a slight jump and looked up guilty to see the group watching her intensely – how could she not have noticed?

“Obviously,” she said, gesturing to her coat.

The two ginger guys frowned at her in surprise and she looked at them angrily for a moment, before averting her eyes back to the man.

“Ok, but stay away the forest,” he said, turning his back to her.

She looked at him in surprise, feeling this was slightly rude but giving a shrug and walking out of the room. She found her favourite spot of the grand stairway up to the castle and sat on the edge, dangling her feet over the 20ft drop and pulling out her cigarettes and lighting up.

She was feeling quite lost at the moment – nobody had explained what they thought was wrong with Harry and she had the sudden feeling that she'd be in this place forever, just waiting...

She heard a set of footsteps behind her and she looked over her shoulder to see one of the ginger haired guys walking out of the entrance hall. She watched him closely, taking a deep pull of her cigarette, surprised to see he didn't even notice her – blind or what? However he suddenly looked up, as if sensing he was being watched and met her eyes.

"Hey," he said, sounding very unsure of himself.

She took a long moment replying, blowing out a large plume of smoke before looking at him dead in the eye, "Hey yourself."

"I wouldn't let them catch you sitting up there," he said with a slight laugh.

He was nervous, she thought happily. One of the magicians actually seemed scared of her.

"It's a long way down," she agreed, trying to make it sound as threatening as she possibly could.

Maybe this was the way to deal with these people, make them afraid of her, give herself a bit of control back?

"Well...be careful then," he tried, looking hopelessly lost, "Harry wouldn't like hearing we let you get hurt here."

And there it goes, all the control, all the strength...all they had to do was mention his name...

She turned away from him, effectively ending the conversation and she continued on with her cigarette. After a moment she heard him continuing down the stairs and she stared at the scenery in front of her unseeingly, mind back on what they were doing back in the hospital and Harry...

She bent over, burying her face in her hands as she let her thoughts wash over her. In some small part of her heart, she wished that when she opened her eyes, she'd be back in her stepfathers flat, sitting on her bed, when the worst thing she had to worry about was him coming home or the police coming. Not about magicians and curses, about Harry being comatose, about nightmares with red eyes and green flashes of light.

She took a shuddering breath and slowly peeked through her fingers, seeing the lawns roll away in front of her, the big lake, the dark forest...She was still here. Her nightmare wouldn't stop when she woke up.

She gave a sniff, furiously rubbing her face and swinging her legs back over the wall. Giving a grimace as her ribs protested at the moment, she slid down and walked down the steps. The urge to go into the forest overcame her once more and she wondered whether what the man had said was true, that the Sagittarius creatures in there really could see the future. If she went in there, found one of them, they could tell her what was going to happen to her, and to Harry. She reached the lawn and hesitated slightly, what if the forest really was dangerous? But the need to know outweighed the dangers, she had to find out what was going to happen to Harry.

"Snape's going to brew up another potion I think," floated a voice down towards her suddenly.

She looked over her shoulder quickly and saw Remus and the long haired ginger man walking down the steps towards her. Swearing under her breath, Kitty darted behind the statue nearest quickly and listened intently to what the two men were talking about.

"Finger's crossed," mused Remus distantly.

They continued walking down and Kitty stared at them suspiciously, were they talking about Harry? They were going to give him a potion? What the hell!

“Bill, have you seen Tonks today?” came the Remus’ voice again, “she left here last night very upset.”

He sounded worried and Kitty looked up interestedly.

“Briefly,” came the reply, “she came over to the house for a bit of last minute advice from me.”

“Advice?” he asked quickly, stopping in his tracks, “What about?”

“I’m not quite sure if I can say...” he said hesitantly and she remembered her theories about their love life she’d concocted the day before.

“Bill,” said Remus, sounding serious, “if Tonks is in trouble, then I should know...”

Should you, thought Kitty curiously, and why do you think that is?

“I understand that Remus,” said Bill, “but, I just think she doesn’t really wants anyone to know...”

“She wanted you to know,” he pointed out.

Bitter, Kitty wondered, slightly jealous?

“She needed professional advice,” Bill assured him and Kitty heard something in his voice that made her grin, he knew.

“Listen Bill,” said Remus and Kitty watched him take his elbow and lead him a little off the beaten track, “please tell me.”

“It’s about Gringotts,” he said finally, sounding slightly like his arm had been twisted, “about her repayments and bank vault.”

“What’s wrong with it?”

“She’s hasn’t got one basically. They closed it about two weeks ago.”

“Why did they close it?” he asked sounding puzzled

“Well apparently she got badly overdrawn, took out a few loans to cover it and can’t pay it back – Goblins can you believe it?”

“She borrowed off Goblins?” he asked incredulously.

“I know...” sighed Bill, “but I don’t know what’s she’s going to do, she already lost her flat.”

“I thought she had to move out, something about remodelling the place?” said Remus, sounding even more worried now.

“ Yeah, that’s what she told all of us too. Apparently it was repossessed - an instalment for the repayments but she just hasn’t got enough money to pay off the next one, so they’re holding a petty crimes hearing down at the Wizmagot,” said Bill, and by the lowered tones Kitty could tell this was a conversation in confidence.

“ Why didn’t she tell me, us?” said Remus and she nodded knowingly, another slip of the tongue.

“You know how headstrong Tonks is,” said Bill with a slight laugh, “she only told me because she needed advice on how Gringotts deal with this sort of thing.”

There was a long silence and Kitty risked peeking further around the statue, Bill had his back to her but Remus was staring at the ground with an unreadable expression on his face. She could see the cogs in his head turning and wondered again what the story between them was.

“How much does she owe?” he asked finally.

“Enough,” replied Bill, “she didn’t say how much, but it’s more than her two jobs can pay back.”

“That’s why she’s been working at the prison?” he demanded, “nearly killing herself?”

“Apparently,” shrugged the other man, “at least that explains why she wouldn’t let us stop her from working there after she got ill.”

“Can’t her family help her?”

“I don’t know to be honest, she said something about direct debit fees for a muggle transfer so it sounds like that’s where her money’s going – her dad’s bank account. You know her dad doesn’t work now he looks after her mum, I guess Tonks is subsidising them.”

“Merlin,” Remus muttered, leaning against the statue now, “is there anything we can do?”

“Maybe if she’d told us earlier,” shrugged Bill, sounding almost as worried, “she’s in the hearing now but she said that she was coming here after a shift at the prison. I don’t know what else we can do, she’s been in a really odd mood for the past few weeks.”

Kitty saw Remus nod heavily and once again she wondered what the situation was between them, he looked seriously worried.

“You’re right, she has,” he finally agreed, sounding as if he’d only just realised, “she’s been very argumentative hasn’t she?”

“Stressed out probably,” agreed Bill, “wouldn’t you with the goblins after you? She’s snapped at me a few times too and all but punched Charlie once or twice...She’s had a few blazers with you by the sounds of it.”

“That wasn’t actually her fault though,” he admitted, “I deserved it...”

“Well, when you spend so much time with someone you’re bound to fall out sometimes,” said Bill with an odd tone in his voice.

The statement hung in the air and Kitty was intrigued to see Remus give him a very peculiar look.

“Anyway, she should be along this evening hopefully,” Bill told him, as if he hadn’t said anything untoward, “she said something about trying to talk to Cathy again, she’s really worried about her.”

Kitty gave a blank look at the wall in front of her at the mention of this and couldn’t help but edge forward.

“I know she is,” sighed Remus heavily, obviously letting his comment go, “as am I. She just sits on that bed all day watching over Harry or not saying anything at all – and when she does she’s just so defensive and suspicious of us...”

“Well after what they must have been through are you surprised?” asked Bill as Kitty’s eyes grew wider, she thought they never took any notice of her.

“Of course not. But she won’t even let us heal her injuries,” he said sadly, “she must be in agony with those broken ribs and she’s still got that muggle plaster cast on her arm!”

“Why won’t she let us heal her?” asked Bill incredulously, obviously taken aback at the idea of lasting injuries.

“She’s scared of magic,” he replied flatly, “and us. But I just wish she’d give us a way in, let us show her we’re not all Death Eaters and duelling.”

“That’s going to be hard,” Bill replied truthfully, “some people never get over it. But she’s one of the few people that’s managed to escape from him, and that’s got to count for something. She looks like a strong girl, she’s obviously been taking care of Harry.”



“Yes...I never thought about it like that,” said Remus slowly, “the last time I saw him before he ran away he was in such a state, about Sirius...”

“Cathy must have been helping him through it,” Bill said thoughtfully, “and people should be a bit more grateful for that.”

“That’s what Tonks and I have been saying!” Remus said, as if Bill had just proved him right, “Cathy’s the only reason he’s still here! But there doesn’t seem to be any way we can show her how grateful we are...”

Kitty stared at the statues in front of her in wonder, someone was on her side? She couldn’t believe it...somebody actually cared...

“And she quite obviously loves Harry and is petrified of what he’ll be like when he wakes up,” Remus was saying unhappily, “I just don’t think there’s any way we can show her anything she’ll like.”

“Well, from what I’ve seen of Harry I know he won’t be angry at her,” said Bill with a slight laugh, trying to inject some humour back into the conversation, “she’s too pretty! And she seems cool enough, she’ll realise eventually – I can see her and Tonks getting along well.”

“Can you imagine them on the loose together,” said Remus half-heartedly, obviously thinking about her hearing, “I hope it goes well for her today, she needs a break.”

“Me too,” agreed Bill, also not feeling the humour, “where is Cathy anyway? I thought she came outside?”

Kitty shrunk behind the statue slightly as they looked around.

“She often does, she usually sits up there, smoking,” he said and Bill looked slightly surprised, “I hope she hasn’t gone into the forest again...”

“The Forest?” asked Bill quickly, sounding worried.

“I had to practically drag her out of there last night,” confirmed Remus grimly.

“You went in there too? With things as they are?” he asked incredulously, “well...sounds like she’s more like Harry than we thought.”

Kitty gave a pleased laugh, so Harry was tempted by the forest too? That was always good to know.

“That’s what I’m worried about,” moaned Remus, “she’s probably off hunting for vampires and werewolves again, said she’d love to meet them, see if they were annoyed at the bad press or something...”

“Really?” asked Bill, a strange tone in his voice, before giving a slight laugh, “maybe you should have told her she already had – common interest and all that!”

Kitty stumbled back away from the statue with a horrified look on her face as she heard him give a slightly uncomfortable laugh.

“Anyway, I better get back to mum, she’s cooking dinner for the whole family, I’d be late on pain of death,” joked Bill, as if he hadn’t just dropped the bomb like he had.

“Ok, send Molly my regards. If you see Tonks before she comes here will you tell her...” he began, unable to find the right words, “just say I’m sorry and I hope it went ok. Owl me when you hear?”

“Of course.”

Kitty could do nothing but gape in shock, before suddenly feeling the fear take over and turned and ran as fast as she could in the opposite direction.

Later on this evening Remus glanced at the clock on the wall and realised that Tonks was long overdue and stood up frowning. The news about her Gringotts accounts had troubled him greatly and he needed to know what was going on now. He pulled on his travel cloak and popped his head into Madam Pomfrey’s office.

“I’m just going out for an hour or two,” Remus told her, “if there’s any trouble, could you contact me?”

“Of course Mr. Lupin” she said, not looking up from the small cauldron she was stirring.

Remus walked through the hospital wing, glancing over to Harry one last time. He was still out cold, looking almost exactly the same as when he arrived and he gave a sigh, why wasn’t he getting any better? He looked down the room to the bed that was the only one with a light on. Cathy was sitting up, arms wrapped around her drawn-up knees again, staring at him.

“Good night Cathy,” he said, giving her a slight wave.

She continued to stare fearfully at him, eyes round as saucers. He dropped his hand slightly and after giving another half-hearted smile wandered out of the room.

He made his way out of the castle, striding quickly across the laws until he reached the great iron gates to the castle, walking down to Hogsmeade. He used the fireplace at the Three Broomsticks to travel to Tonks’ friends flat. It was the first time he’d floo’d to one of the new Ministry fireplace, which had new checkpoints, and for some reason, doorbells. He was left spinning around for a few moments before the fireplace suddenly let him out and he strode forward to meet a tall witch carrying a baby on her hip.

“Ah, you must be Geri?” he said, holding out his hand, “I’m Remus Lupin, a friend of Tonks?”

“Of course, I’ve heard all about you,” she said smiling, taking his hand for a moment.

“Is she back yet?” he asked hopefully, as Geri led him away from the fire.

“She’s in her room,” she replied, note of anxiety in her voice, “I don’t know if she’s up to taking visitors, she’s had a long day.”

“Yes, I’ve heard about it,” he replied grimly, “would you mind if I just spoke to her quickly?”

“Of course not, she’s in the office just over there,” she said, pointing over at one of the doors off the living room, “we’re just off out so I’ll probably see you again soon.”

“Most probably,” he said, “goodbye!”

She stepped through the fire he’d just emerged from and he walked over to Tonks’ room, hesitating slightly when he got there as he composed himself.

“Tonks?” Remus asked, knocking on the door.

He waited for an answer but it was completely silent and after a moments hesitation he pushed the door open slowly. It was dark in the room beyond but there was a solitary candle, sitting on a desk overflowing with parchment that cast just enough light to give a vague sketch of the room. It was clear it was usually a study and spare room, but a small couch had been forced into the corner on which Tonks was lying.

“Tonks?” he tried again, when the figure didn’t move, “Sorry to disturb you...”

She had the crook of her elbow pressed over her eyes that made it hard for him to tell whether she was asleep or just resting. However, his question was soon answered when he heard her give a slight sniff and clear her throat.

“That’s ok,” she said, voice sounding quite gravelly for some reason.

After a moments indecision he walked across the room until he was standing next to the couch, feeling slightly unsure of himself.

“Are you angry with me?” he asked eventually.

“No,” came her muffled reply.

He watched her worriedly for a few moments, she didn't sound like herself at all, he could practically feel the anxiety and depression radiating off her. He'd seen her in a quite a few different moods in the past few weeks, but none of them contained the bleak hopelessness of this and he couldn't figure out what to do.

“How did it go today?” he asked her, still hovering at her side.

She gave a sniff and he realised at once he'd caught her crying, that explained the gravelly voice and monosyllabic answers. Sure enough when he looked closer he could see the damp sleeve of her shirt and the tear tracks down her cheeks.

“Did it go badly?” he asked anxiously now, sitting on the edge of the sofa.

“I'm not in Azkaban yet am I?” she managed to choke out, and she removed the arm across her face to wipe her cheeks clean.

She was avoiding his eyes and he felt his heart constrict slightly at the sight of her tortured expression.

“What did they say?” he said, trying not to let it show how he felt.

She rubbed her face with her hands and spent some time trying to fix her appearance to look calmer and under control. However this was entirely impossible due to the state she was in and Remus watched her silently.

“I've got to pay a fixed amount by the end of this month,” she spluttered, face creasing up in pain, “or I'll have a custodial sentence.”

Remus stared at her, unable to say anything for a moment, sitting in the depressive silence. She gave another sniff and tried to stem the

tears slightly, before looking over to him. All at once he was taken aback, almost entranced by her expression of helplessness.

“I won’t be able to,” she whispered, “I’m going to lose my job...”

She couldn’t help it, she began to cry and Remus couldn’t stand it any more, he reached out and pulled her into a hug. This time she didn’t push him away and he relaxed slightly, concentrating with every pore of his being on her.

“Why didn’t you tell me?” he asked her quietly.

“I couldn’t,” she sobbed, “I just couldn’t...”

He tried to hush her, smoothing her hair down slowly. He didn’t really know how long they sat there, but Tonks, when her tears finally subsided, managed to recount her whole tale to him. How her bank account had been closed, how she had to take up her second job, her loan from the goblins, her court appearance...He couldn’t help but feel her helplessness, there didn’t seem any way for her to get out her situation save a windfall or a miracle.

“So, there it is...” she finally mumbled into his shoulder, “I’m a gonner aren’t I?”

“We’ll sort it out Tonks,” he assured her, still smoothing down her hair.

“I don’t know how,” she said.

Me neither, he couldn’t help but think – how was he going to sort this out?

“Look,” she said a while later, “I’ve made your robes all wet.”

She pulled out of his grasp and patted his shoulder. He gave a slight smile.

“Saves on washing them I guess,” he said and she gave a watery smile.

Her face was all red still and there were tear tracks down her cheeks where her make-up had run and he gave a slight smile, brushing a tear off her cheek with his thumb. She looked up into his eyes for the first time and for a long moment they simply stared at each other, he felt like he couldn't have said anything or looked away if he was offered all the money in the world.

However, he noticed her cheeks were flushing and she looked away suddenly, making a big show of rubbing her face. He sat back, all at once feeling very confused, what had just happened between them? He knew deep down what it was, but he didn't think he could believe it, or cope with it at that moment in time.

“You know what I feel like?” she asked him, putting on a brave face.

“A nice cup of tea?” he asked, giving a comforting smile.

“You read my mind,” she said, getting up a stretching slightly, rubbing her face again, “I bet I look monstrous now.”

“I tell you what, I'll go and put the kettle on, and you can get cleaned up?” he asked and she gave a firm nod.

He walked into the kitchen and after a few minutes of trying to find his way around he located the teabags and milk. He quite admired the way some magical/muggle families managed to combine their two worlds, something Tonks was perfectly used to, he'd noticed that she very often did things in the complete muggle way without even realising it. Sometimes he found doing things the muggle way very relaxing, waiting for the kettle to boil, waiting for the tea to brew...

He realised that his musings had been wandering vaguely in a nonsensical way and trying to compose his thoughts he leant on the counter and stared at the kettle. How was he going to sort this out? It seemed to be impossible to him, but it couldn't be because if the

worst happened, Tonks would be losing more than her job. He had to help her.

He looked up at a noise to see Tonks walking into the kitchen. She'd changed into muggle clothes, washed her face and even her hair, which she was now drying with a towel. He couldn't help but feel a strange flutter in his heart when he saw her, confirming his earlier thoughts.

She sat on a stool to the other side of the counter, placing the towel besides her as her hair began to lengthen and turn a shade of dark purple, almost black hair. Washing her face hadn't seemed to make her look any less tired or stressed out, instead now her weary air seemed to have been highlighted.

"Can you not tell anyone else about this?" she asked him in a small voice finally, "not until it's necessary."

"If that's what you think is best," he said, pouring the tea into the cups.

"You don't think so?" she asked, eyes fixed on the mug.

"Listen Tonks, maybe we could all help-" he began.

"I'm not going to become some charity case," she told him firmly.

"You might have to," he told her, staring into her eyes.

She looked away and he found it difficult to gauge what she was thinking. He looked back to the tea, taking his time as he stirred in the sugar and milk, sliding the mug across to her. He walked around the counter and sat down next to her, sipping his boiling tea as he studied her appearance. She was wearing a tight tee shirt with the words Wyrd Sisters - Live in Concert, October 1995 printed across the back, but that wasn't what he was studying, it was the way he could see her ribs through the material and her stomach was practically concave. Comparing her to when he'd seen her just over a



week ago in the bikini and then a few days ago changing in the kitchen he couldn't believe the change in her appearance.

"I'm sorry about yesterday."

It took him a few moments to realise she was speaking to him and he looked up blankly.

"Pardon?"

"I said I'm sorry," she repeated, staring into her tea, "about my...behaviour last night."

"I understand," he said, "at least, now I do."

She gave a dry laugh, before picking with a bitten down nail at the rim of her mug, "No, I said some horrible things to you...and I didn't mean anything, I was just – tired."

"We often say the things we truly feel when we're under stress or upset," he said.

She nodded heavily, but didn't look happy about it.

"But we'll sort it out Tonks," he said encouragingly, "pay back the money, get your home back, sort out your jobs-"

"Its not going to happen Remus," she said glumly, "is it? Honestly?"

"If we make it happen," he said firmly.

"We can't make money," she told him, looking dearly sorry this was the case.

"We'll get the money," he told her earnestly, "don't worry yet."

She gave a dry laugh, shaking her head mutely at him as she grasped the mug in two hands and blew on the tea. He frowned slightly, eyes drawn back down to her skinny appearance.

“When was the last time you ate?” he asked her and she looked up sharply.

“Lunch,” she lied.

He gave a look at her and she gave an irritated sigh.

“What? I didn’t particularly feel like eating today,” she muttered.

“In that case I can see this is the perfect occasion to unleash my Shepard’s Pie on another unsuspecting victim,” he said, small smile on his face.

Tonks gave him a surprised look - since when did Remus joke?

“Pie sounds...good,” she said blankly, “better than good actually...”

“Ok, sit back and prepare to be amazed,” he laughed, getting up and wandering into the kitchen.

Tonks watched him for a long time, stomach doing it’s now familiar tango dance with her insides as he searched the cupboards for pots and pans as a knife chopped a carrot as if guided by an invisible hand. She couldn’t help but feel completely confused right at that moment, it had been a long stressful day, but somehow she was having trouble fixing her mind on it now. All she could think about was the hug he’d given her whilst in her room, at first she hadn’t even realised, she’d been so upset she couldn’t think straight, but now...now her mind wouldn’t stop dwelling on it.

Was it because she had been upset, or was there something more? There was that look in his eyes...something that had made her stop and stare right back, as if for a small moment, she could actually read him...

“How hungry are you feeling?” he shouted from the kitchen, “I’m thinking I’m cooking for thirty with the amount of carrots I’ve got here.”

“I needed to improve my night vision anyway,” she told him, getting up and heading in to help him, “we can always leave some in the fridge for Geri and Steve.”

“I think we might have to do that,” he said as she laughed at the mountain of veg, “I’m not used to cooking for two.”

For two she realised, her stomach gave a happy lurch and she couldn’t help but feel her heart give a flutter – honestly, she chided herself, can’t you keep your thoughts grounded for at least one minute?

“Since it promises to be so amazing,” she said, looking into the pan, “shall I set the table?”

“That’s a novel idea,” he noted, smiling.

“I know, it’s always balanced on knees or folders for me,” she said, stretching up to the cupboard above them for the placemats.

“Here,” he offered, also reaching up to help.

His fingers brushed against her and she couldn’t help but jump slightly. To make matters worse she drew attention to it by giving a slightly nervous laugh and he looked at her with another smile, making her already shattered confidence sink even further as she went weak at the knees.

He opened his mouth to say something when a funny crackling sound reached both their ears and he looked up in confusion. Tonks felt like crying, such was the feeling of complete and utter devastation she felt. Slowly she raised her wrist to her mouth.

“N. Tonks, 3259 receiving,” she said glumly.

She couldn't even stand to look at Remus at that moment, if she had, her secret would have been revealed in a microsecond.

"Tonks, get here now, we're in trouble!" shouted the voice desperately, "13, Crickley Hill, Edgbaston!"

Then there was silence. Without thinking Tonks darted out of the kitchen, rushing into her room, grabbing her wand and throwing her robes over her head, knowing every second counted. She hurried back into the lounge, ready to apparate before seeing Remus walking out of the kitchen, unreadable expression on his face.

"Sorry Remus," she said quickly, "I have to go-"

"Of course," he nodded, "be careful ok?"

She gave a silent nod and with a sharp crack, was gone.

Remus stood watching the blank space for a long time, before turning around and moving back into the kitchen, clearing up the remains of his half cooked meal.

AN/ Wow! So, updates are coming faster and faster now! Go me! This is because I'm a reverse writer and write the ends of my stories before the beginnings, hehehe - so I've always known the fate of our dear Kitty and Harry (and Tonks and Remus).

So to all those who are pointing out the major plot flaw of Voldemort being killed - don't worry (or conversely do worry) because he's not dead. Also, there's no pleasing you people, when it's a muggle-fic you want more magic and when I add magic back into the mix you don't like it! And for those that wanted Harry awake this chapter, firstly it doesn't fit in with my plotline, and secondly, don't you want to see Kitty try to deal with Hogwarts and 'Magicians' for a while and go slowly mad? Lols.

And one final only TWO reviewers throughout the whole of this fic have pointed out my third plotline - hahahaa - you're all in for a bit of a shake-up soon, promise ;)

## Chapter Twenty Two

No one knows what it's like,  
To feel these feelings,  
Like I do.  
And I blame you.

Tonks' eyes were just beginning to droop when she spotted movement in the hospital wing. She sat up slightly and blinked rapidly, trying to get them back into focus in the gloom. She watched as Kitty carefully and silently pulled back the curtains around her bed and looked around. She obviously hadn't spotted Tonks because, silent as a mouse, she began to tiptoe towards the door. Tonks sat up further, slipping her wand out and also tried not to make a sound, desperately wishing she wasn't about to make another escape attempt, she didn't want to have to use magic on her if it was at all possible.

However, as she watched the girl pad across the room, shivering from the cold in her bare feet and thin robe it soon became obvious that she wasn't trying to escape. She was heading over to Harry's bed. Tonks was struck by a moments indecision over the next course of action, but settled for sitting up more and simply watching suspiciously what was happening.

She stopped at the edge of the bed and did nothing for a good few minutes, simply stood staring at Harry, expression unreadable in the gloom. Tonks bit her lip, worrying over what Kitty was going to do when she heard her beginning to whisper to him. She let out the breath she had been unconsciously holding and sat back, a dreamy smile on her face - she remembered what first love was like.

The nightmares seemed to make the whole ordeal that little bit harder to cope with. Every time she tried to pull herself together and tell herself to think rationally, she'd have another dream, and she lost that courage again. And all she desperately wanted was for Harry to be awake, for him to explain to her what was going on, what was going to happen. To tell her to stop thinking about it, that everything would be alright.

So she went to see him. She didn't know what for, whether it was for answers, or just to remind herself that he was still here, somewhere. And when she got there, she couldn't help the tears springing into her eyes, thinking about Harry, and what he'd been through, and her guilt because she was the one who got them caught.

"Heya Harry," she whispered, sitting down on the edge of the bed.

She stared at his pale, unresponsive face and felt her spirits sink even lower.

"When are you going to wake up?" she asked, brushing her damp cheeks irritably.

There was nothing but the ringing silence of the hospital wing and Kitty sighed to herself heavily.

"I think they're worried you haven't woken up yet," she whispered, "they told me you'd be fine by now, I knew they were lying..."

Harry's unconscious form had nothing to add to conversation and Kitty gave a great sniff reaching across the bed and picking up his cold, limp hand, lacing her fingers through his.

"I'm sorry I let them find you..." she choked out, feeling the weight of the guilt that had been building since she'd arrived in the castle pressing down on her, suffocating her, "I was so stupid to let them bring you here...I should have stopped them..."

She broke off, giving a dry sob before looking around, suddenly panicked, she didn't want anyone to see her out of bed and over here. However, the hospital was empty and she turned back to Harry, hoping maybe something about his manner had changed, as if he would realise she was there. She was bitterly disappointed to see he was still out cold, still that horrible sickly yellow colour, still silent.

"I wish you were awake," she whispered hoarsely, "it's horrible here, I know why you had to get away now...these people are all..."

She broke off and tried to get her tears under control, studying his hand in hers with unseeing eyes, "I'm so scared here Harry..."

There, she'd said it, she'd admitted what she never had done before, that she was scared. However, Harry marked this momentous occasion in her life by doing nothing at all and the guilt turned to frustration.

"Wake up Harry!" she demanded angrily, tears of frustration rolling down her face, "I need you awake now! Please! I'm scared and I need you with me! We have to get out of here!"

Nothing. Silence. The only sound in the whole of the hospital wing was her tears and whispers and his steady breathing.

"What's going to happen now? What are you going to do when you wake up? Are you staying here?"

The questions and demands were tumbling out of her mouth, accusing him of things he might do, and Kitty was torn between utter despair and utter fury that he would do nothing.

"How can you just sit there and let me go through this on my own?" she demanded angrily, "how can you let me have to deal with these people, try and figure out what's happened? Try and work out what going to happen to us now! You're being so selfish!"

She knew she was being ridiculous now, that it wasn't Harry's fault at all that he was in this state, that he'd give anything to be awake and better. But that didn't make it easier for her. In fact it made it harder, because now they were both being kept here against their will.

"That day Harry, when we got caught..." she took a shaky deep breath, "you were going to tell me about all this weren't you? That was your big secret, the thing you'd been running from, wasn't it? Tom Riddle and his gang?"

Kitty paused again, trying to make all the pieces of the puzzle in her head slot into place...she knew Harry, or at least the old Harry, so she must be able to figure out what he'd been thinking...

"And you were going to tell me?" she whispered, "you wanted to go back...not to the Dursley', but to the magicians? With me?"

Her shoulders slumped heavily.

"So you wanted to come back."

Kitty dropped her head onto the bed covers as this realisation stole over her. She didn't want to believe it, because that meant there was no future for her and Harry, he would run away from here again and they weren't going to let her stay.

Tonks woke up with a jolt, not knowing the reason but staring around her surrounding suspiciously for a moment. She had fallen asleep sitting up in a chair at the hospital wing and she gave a frown of annoyance, she had meant to go home last night after the potion Madame Pomfrey had given her for her injured shoulder had taken effect. Instinctively he looked over to Harry's bed, remembering watching Kitty visit him last night. It took her a few moments to realise the reason for the oddly shaped extra lump on his bed.

She checked her watch, realising with a start Madame Pomfrey would be doing her rounds in a few minutes and probably wouldn't like to find two bodies in Harry's bed rather than one. She got up, stretching the aches and pains out of her body and wandered over to his bed, standing at the foot for a few moments, surveying the scene. Kitty was stretched out along Harry's left side, face nestled into his neck and shoulder, sleeping soundly for the first time since she'd arrived in Hogwarts.

Tonks felt strangely emotional as she watched them, feeling a great dead weight in her stomach as she thought about Moody's plan to obliviate her. It was just so wrong. What right did they have to break up two people in love? If Harry was perhaps only two or three years older, they wouldn't even consider doing it, it would be unthinkable.



She shook herself out of her reverie, remembering the time and walking around the side of the bed. She carefully pulled Kitty's arm off his chest and shook her slightly by the shoulders. She gave a murmur, smiling slightly as she entered consciousness. However, within a second she had become tensed and alert, snapping open her eyes and sitting bolt upright suddenly, staring at Tonks.

"Wotcher Cathy," said Tonks weakly, taken aback by the girls sudden behaviour.

"I didn't do anything," she said accusingly, glaring at Tonks.

"I know that," she said, stepping back, "just thought you might like to know the nurse is on her way."

"Oh, ok," she said blankly, looking around the room then down at Harry.

"You best get into you're own bed," said Tonks helpfully, feeling Kitty had her defences rather low at the moment, despite the leap into action earlier, "she can be a right dragon when it comes to stuff like this."

"Yeah right," she agreed, sliding off the bed, ignoring the hands Tonks had held up to help her.

She watched the girl carefully, noting she had winced as she moved and was walking with her back held extremely straight. She decided to walk Kitty back to her bed, just in case Madam Pomfrey -

"What are you doing out of bed at this time of the morning?" demanded a sudden voice startlingly close to Tonks' ear.

She gave a start, spinning around guiltily, as did Kitty to see the matron standing with her hands on her hips.

"I..." began Kitty, breaking off under the glare, looking affronted.

Tonks was sure she was probably preparing a catty remark back.

"I was just helping her to the toilet," cut in Tonks, giving the matron a reassuring smile.

"Oh, I see," she said, narrowing her eyes suspiciously, "well, don't stand around all day barefoot in this freezing weather, you'll catch your death of cold! Back into bed you get."

Tonks turned to Kitty and gave her a significant look and they both hurried over to her cubicle. She tried to stop herself bursting out laughing when she heard Kitty mutter 'Yes Sah!' in a posh military-like accent. She climbed into her bed and gave Tonks a wary look that didn't hold its usual hostility.

"You're right, she is such a bitc-" she began, before cutting off and lamely adding, "dragon."

Tonks laughed, "You get used to it. After you're first few times in here you learn to just go with the flow."

"Get injured a lot do you?" asked Kitty.

Tonks couldn't help but feel surprised – she never usually spoke to people for more than a few seconds, and then it was usually only to insult them.

"You tend to at a school like this," said Tonks with a cheerful shrug, "I hear Harry's been in here so many times he's nearly got his own bed."

"Really?" she asked, sitting up and looking truly interested for the first time since she'd seen her, "How come?"

"Well, usually sporting injuries," she said, sitting on the side of the girls bed, "and the occasional duel I guess."

"Sporting injuries?" she asked, "What sport does he play? Football? Or is it some weird magical football where the ball is invisible or something?"

Tonks laughed appreciatively, wondering how in the world she was supposed to explain Quidditch to a complete muggle.

“No, it’s not football. It’s a game called Quidditch, about as popular in the magical world as football is in yours. He’s on the house team.”

“What house?” she asked, drawing her knees up to her chin as if getting ready for a good story.

“Well the school has four houses, which the students live with in their own separate parts of the castle – Harry’s in Gryffindor, which is the house for students chosen for their bravery and courage.”

“Harry had a flag in his room back in Surrey with Gryffindor on it,” she said, as if suddenly remembering something, “red and gold with a lion right? I thought it was some weird kitsch thing he’d bought!”

“Yeah that’s right, he probably got it off one of the entrepreneurial students in his house that go into wheeler dealing,” said Tonks with a laugh, “probably the Twins.”

“Who are they?” she asked with a slight grin, “they sound ominous – things pronounced with capital letters always sound ominous to me...”

“Trust me, they are,” admitted Tonks, “they’re twin guys who are a few years older than Harry, brothers to Ron – Harry’s best friend. They’re all coming down today.”

Tonks thought this would do Kitty the world of good, a chance to talk to Harry’s friends, people her own age. She knew that they’d all do their best to help Kitty feel at home.

“Whatever - so back to the point of the story,” asked Kitty, making a motion for them to backtrack, “you didn’t tell me about the magical football.”

“Well, it might take a bit of explaining...” began Tonks, grinning as the girl sat back, ready to listen, “ok, here it goes...”

Twenty minutes later Tonks was still explaining, with the use of wild hand movements of excited babble, the wonders of Quidditch to an awe struck Kitty. It had taken some time to explain, introducing the broomsticks had been interesting, and Kitty had begun hysterically laughing at the thought of wizards and witches actually flying. The bludgers had been fun, she'd immediately decided she would be a beater if ever she played.

"That sounds so cool!" gushed Kitty looked flushed and excited when the explanation had finally finished, "The youngest in a century! He's such a liar, he told me he was crap at sports!"

"Well, he probably is at everything else," laughed Tonks, "Remus said that Harry's dad was a natural in the air too, must run in the family."

"Harry never speaks about his parents," she replied, smile fading slowly.

"No, he never does apparently," shrugged Tonks, "not even to Ron or Hermione."

"Who's Hermione?" Kitty asked, looking instantly suspicious.

"Whoa, you've got nothing to worry about there," Tonks said, smiling at Kitty's behaviour, "she's one of Harry best friends, I don't think he's really realised she's a girl yet."

"Why, is she a tomboy?" demanded Kitty, obviously instantly taking against her.

"No – she's a genius, but they've been friends since they were 11 so he hasn't really noticed. She's coming today as well, you'll like her."

"Oh, right..." she said, looking slightly put-out, before glancing over to Harry for a moment, "When's he waking up?"

“Soon,” said Tonks, stomach twisting anxiously.

“How soon?” she demanded.

“I’m not sure to be honest, we all thought it’s just be a simple case of patching him up and reviving him but he seems to have something else wrong that we can’t quite place so far.”

“You said he’d be better in a few hours,” she accused and Tonks shifted uncomfortably.

“We thought he would be,” she repeated, trying not to let the worry and confusion show.

“He was better off in hospital,” Kitty told her simply, “at least there he had proper machines checking up on him, look at him here - nothing! Where’s his drip? And his heart monitor and everything?”

“We don’t need them,” explained Tonks, “we use magic for all that.”

Kitty looked like this was the worst possible answer Tonks could have given and she tried to give her a comforting smile.

“Not all magic’s bad Cathy,” she told her in a quiet voice, “he’s got his kidney back now, his arms not broken anymore, apart from being asleep, there’s nothing wrong with him now.”

Kitty stared at her for a long moment, slightly open mouthed in shock.

“He’s got his kidney...back?” she demanded incredulously.

“Yeah,” Tonks smiled, “no more stab wound, no more broken bones, no more cuts.”

Kitty couldn’t help it, she had to smile at this and she looked over at Harry happily for a moment. Tonks studied the girl carefully, assessing her own injuries.

“Did you break your ribs Cathy?” she asked.

Kitty’s eyes snapped back to her and she unconsciously rested a hand on her chest, before giving a shrug, then a wince.

“They must be painful?” she stated, before shuffling a little bit closer. “Listen Cathy, I know you hate magic and want nothing more for us never to have found you, for you and Harry to still be on your own together. And I understand why you’re so scared and confused...But I can’t help you if you won’t let me.”

Kitty stared at the bedclothes in front of her, closed expression on her face that forcibly reminded her of Remus for a moment.

“I don’t need any help,” Kitty said, usually stolid voice sounding uncertain, “I’m fine.”

“Cathy, you and me both know broken ribs and arms takes months to heal,” Tonks told her, “and you know we wouldn’t do anything to harm you?”

Kitty looked uncertain, as she didn’t entirely believe they didn’t want to hurt her.

“Let me heal them for you,” she said quietly, “It takes one spell, one second and all you feel is a tingling, hot sensation. You’ve got to get used to magic somehow...what do you say?”

Kitty glanced over at Harry for a moment, before letting her shoulders slump slightly.

“Fine,” she said.

“Excellent,” said Tonks, getting up and sitting on the bed next to Kitty.

Wordlessly, Kitty lifted up her top to show Tonks the livid bruise that covered her entire chest, steering wheel shaped imprint still clearly visible. Tonks tried to hide her horror, grimacing slightly as she raised

her wand. Kitty flinched terribly and turned her face away, eyes screwed up tightly as if she was expecting horrible pain.

“Episkey.”

Tonks felt a great sense of satisfaction as the bruises faded into nothing and looked up at Kitty, who still had her face scrunched up.

“Done,” said Tonks, sitting back and watching as Kitty opened her eyes slowly and looked down at her chest.

Tonks grinned as Kitty stared at it in astonishment, before carefully prodding it and giving a whoop of laughter. She twisted her body from side to side and tried an experimental cough.

“It worked!” she said delightedly, “It doesn’t hurt anymore!”

“Told you so,” laughed Tonks, happy to see Kitty smiling for the first time since she’d entered Hogwarts.

“That’s...amazing!” Kitty said in disbelief, “It doesn’t hurt at all...completely healed!”

“Would you like me to do you’re arm?” she asked.

“Sure!” Kitty said hurriedly, holding out her arm that was covered by a heavy plaster cast.

A minute later Kitty was completely healed and Kitty was flexing her fingers experimentally, feeling her no longer bruised eyes and her scar-less head, stitched disappeared.

“Thanks!” Kitty said finally, looking up at Tonks, “Thank you, so much...”

“No problem,” she replied easily, feeling very pleased for herself, “all in a days work.”

Kitty continued to flex her fingers in wonder, "You said you were a policewoman right?"

"Yeah, but don't hold that against me," she laughed, "I'm what we call an Auror, it's my job to catch dark wizards."

"And you work at a prison?"

Tonks looked at her blankly for a moment - how did she know about that?

"I work at the Ministry actually," she replied, slightly suspiciously, "the prisons just a kind of, second job."

"So..." began Kitty thoughtfully, nodding to herself, "you get good wizards and dark wizards."

"Definitely," Tonks said emphatically, privately jumping to joy that Kitty had come up with this observation on her own.

"In that case, are werewolves good wizards or bad wizards?" she demanded suddenly.

Tonks stared at her for a moment, mind going into overdrive. Kitty was meeting her gaze challengingly.

"How did you find out?" she asked flatly.

"I overheard him talking to someone," she replied, surprised to see Tonks was being truthful.

"Well, they're just like people, just like wizards and witches, you can get good ones and dark ones," Tonks said, a little annoyed that Kitty would even consider Remus could be evil.

"And he's good?" she continued.



“The best,” she said, before hastily covering herself, “I mean, he’s good Cathy, don’t worry about it.”

“Didn’t mean to offend you,” she said, grinning slightly, “just making sure.”

“Of course, it’s only natural,” said Tonks in a slightly faraway voice.

“Speak of the devil,” said Kitty suddenly.

Tonks looked up and saw Kitty looking over to the doorway. Tonks turned around and saw Remus walking in, unbuttoning his travelling cloak. Kitty watched Tonks’ expression carefully and then saw the look of surprise that Remus shot her when he noticed she was sitting talking to her.

“Excuse me for a moment Cathy,” she said, already getting up and walking over to meet him.

Kitty grinned to herself, snuggling back down under her blankets and relishing the feeling of being able to breathe easy and the lack of pain.

Tonks meanwhile was hurrying over to Remus, smile on her face.

“How did it go last night?” he asked, without so much of a hello or greeting.

“Got one,” she grinned happily, also skipping the pleasantries, “full Death Eater costume, half-way through a crucio. He’s being tried today!”

“Well done, that’s fantastic,” he said warmly, laying his cloak over the chair next to Harry’s bed, “did I just see you talking to Cathy?”

“Yes!” she said happily, “Managed to get through to her I think! She let me heal her injuries anyway, was asking lots of questions about Harry’s life.”

“She let you heal her?” he asked incredulously, “that’s a big step forward.”

“Definitely,” she replied, “there’s still no change with him though, Madam Pomfrey’s getting anxious now.”

They both turned to look at Harry, frown of worry back on their faces.

“We’re missing something you know,” said Remus heavily, dropping into the seat.

“I can’t think what it is either,” replied Tonks, feeling her happy mood dissipate somewhat, “I just can’t think what it would be, we’ve tested him for poisons, curses...even checked the muggle medicine he had...”

“It doesn’t make sense,” agreed Remus.

“Cathy’s getting suspicious,” Tonks said and they both looked over to the girl, who had wrapped herself in her blankets once more, “this isn’t the spectacular rescue operation we’d all planned.”

“No...aren’t the Weasley’s all coming over today? And Hermione?” he asked and Tonks nodded, “Well, they’ll be able to talk to her, I think Cathy would benefit from company her own age.”

“Yeah, it’ll be good for her to have some friends in the castle.”

Kitty had been aware in a vague way that there were more visitors to the Hospital Wing that day than usual, and she knew this must be the group of friends she’d been warned about. However, she been slipping in and out of sleep all day, relishing the chance to have a painless rest now he’d been healed, and had ignored them.

A little after two however she woke up and couldn’t get back to sleep, knowing that it’d just mean scrambled dreams anyway that left her feeling more tired than before her rest. Instead she swung her legs over the edge of the bed and pulled on her coat and boots. When she looked around the curtain that had been pulled around her bed she

saw the Hospital Wing was empty save for her and the Matron and felt a rush of relief.

She really didn't want to have to meet Harry's friends. Not yet anyway.

Instead, Kitty needed some fresh air, a cigarette and time to think. She couldn't help but dwell on what Tonks had said earlier, you've got to get used to magic.

What had she meant by that, she thought to herself curiously. She read it as if Tonks thought she was sticking around, that didn't sound like something you'd say if you were about to get rid of somebody. She walked out of the castle and down the great sweeping staircase to the lawns, staring at the scenery in front of her in awe. It was such a beautiful place, mountains, lakes, forests, hills as far as the eye could see. It really was just breath taking and some small part of her couldn't help but feel jealous of all those kids who when they were eleven suddenly found out that not only were they magicians, but they could come and spend the next seven years of their lives living here.

It should have been her.

Half way down the stairs she paused and sat down, leaning her head against the banister and sighing deeply, trying to imagine what life would have been like. She could have skipped all those awful schools, all those evil friends, horrible teachers, living with her mom, her dad...a fresh new start...She could have met Harry then, been brought up in a life where there was always going to be food on the table, people to speak to, important things to learn...

But Harry had the same start as you, a little voice whispered nastily in her head, and he wanted to get away from here...

She pulled out the slightly battered pack of cigarettes from her coat pocket and flipped open the lid. There were hardly any left and she gave a sigh, popping one into her mouth, searching around for her lighter. As she took her first deep inhalation she drew her knees up to her chest and rested her chin on them, thoughts a million miles away.

She was quite happy to be left alone for a bit, to get away from all those crazy people and weird things.

But her wish wouldn't be granted, almost as soon as the thought had come into her head she heard a large group of voices, which were bickering, laughing and joking all at once. She closed her eyes wearily, depressed in the knowledge there was nowhere to hide from whomever it was, and she had a pretty good idea of who that was.

"Oh go throw yourself down a mountain on some wood," snapped a male voice irritably behind her.

"For the last time Ron, it's called skiing," came the exasperated reply, "and for your information-"

"Yes Ron, it's called skiing!" came another male voice in a high pitched falsetto.

"Yah! Don't you know anything?" he asked again in a fake posh accent.

"Yeah yeah, everything's a joke to you isn't it?" said the girl nastily.

"Yeah, it is," he simpered and Kitty rolled her eyes.

"Well I don't know how you can laugh at a time like this! Harry is-" she began, obviously furious with whomever she was walking with.

"Whoa," cut in a voice suddenly, dropping in noise level, "look."

There was a significant silence and Kitty knew she'd been discovered. She took a deep drag on her cigarette and waited to see what the little gang would do, she hoped against hope that they would be too scared to say anything to her, or embarrassed or whatever. She heard them shuffling down the stairs together and she realised with a plummeting heart they were going to try and spark up conversation.

She desperately wanted to be left alone.

She looked up at the group which had assembled in front of her on the steps with a closed expression on her face – she half wanted to speak to them, for Harry’s sake, and half wanted to punch their lights out, for no particular reason. For all she knew, they could be the reason Harry wanted to leave – he certainly never spoke about them, and even when he did, it was only in passing. And she was too tired now to try and build ‘relationships’.

“Hello,” said the girl with bushy hair nervously and the others stood in silence, staring at her.

“Hey,” she replied after a slight pause, looking the girl up and down – she must be the famous Hermione.

They didn’t say anything else, looking like they were at a loss for conversation.

“Lovely weather today isn’t it?” she drawled in an imitation of the girls’ accent, giving her a mocking smile.

Hermione went red and the two taller boys, whom she realised, must have been The Twins Tonks had been talking about, sniggered appreciatively.

“Out for a wander?” she asked them, leaning back on the steps and stubbing out her cigarette on the cold stone.

“Sort of,” said one of the twins with a goofy grin on his face as he waved a broomstick at her, “you?”

“Just waiting for my magic carpet,” she told them mockingly, staring at the one she guessed was Ron dead in the eye.

She gave a smirk as the tips of his ears went red and he looked away, and she brushed her fringe braids out of her eyes. She’d only just noticed there was a younger girl tucked away in the group and was pleasantly surprised to see she was glaring daggers at her. Finally, someone with a bit of character.

“I thought you weren’t allowed out of the Hospital Wing,” the young girl said, holding Kitty’s gaze much more impressively than her family had.

“I escaped,” said Kitty mockingly, as if imparting a great secret, leaning forward conspiratorially, “I’m real good at doing that with you lot.”

The older girl looked shocked and slightly annoyed at her reply, as did the rest of them, except for the young girl, who merely smirked back.

“So we noticed,” she asked innocently, “who did you have to beat up this time?”

Hermione exclaimed loudly at the girls open hostility at the same time that Kitty snarled, “Fuck off,” back.

“Hey!” said Ron angrily, ears red again as the rest of the groups nervous smiles faded.

“There’s no need to be rude,” said Hermione with an equally angry look in her eyes.

Kitty merely rolled her eyes and pulled another cigarette out of the packet, popping it into her mouth as the gathered group watched her. When she finished lighting it, she looked up to them with a simple smile other face.

“For your information, it wasn’t only me who beat him up,” she said sweetly, letting the accusation sink in to the shocked looking teenagers, “and I guess you’d do the same if he was trying to slit your throat with a switchblade.”

“Whoa,” said one of the twins as Ron and Hermione shared a horrified look.

They all looked completely stunned and didn’t say anything for a long minute. Kitty was enjoying watching their stumbling unsure behaviour

over her, she felt on much safer ground for the first time in days. She could cope with situations like this, she was good at them, it was when it came to ghosts and moving armour and paintings that she went to pieces.

“Want one?” she asked, offering her pack of cigarettes around the group.

“I don’t smoke,” said Hermione, scrunching her nose up in obvious disgust.

“Why not?” she challenged, enjoying herself immensely.

“Because I don’t want to die from cancer,” she said, irritably.

“Looks to me like you’ve got a lot more things than cancer to be worried about,” she said with a smirk on her face.

“I’m glad you think our war’s funny,” she spat, getting quite obviously riled.

“I don’t, I’ve been there remember?” she said and the girls features softened slightly.

“Of course...Can I – would you mind if I asked you what happened...” she began hesitantly, and Kitty raised an eyebrow in surprise, “while you were away...”

She looked at the girl for a long time, trying to get the measure of her; she couldn’t really figure her out just yet. But she didn’t want to talk about what had happened that night – not now, not ever. There were some things you couldn’t tell people, things you couldn’t describe, even if you wanted to.

“No,” was all she said.

Maybe it was her short tone, or the stony expression on her face, but Hermione took immediate offence to this and glared at her angrily.

“I’m trying to be nice,” she said through gritted teeth.

“What’s the point?” Kitty asked loudly, sick of being interrogated by this stuck up public-school types.

“ Because you’re Harry’s...friend,” she said, looking hurt yet annoyed.

“ So?” she demanded, climbing too her feet and throwing her cigarette the feet of the group, “as soon as he gets better we’re going to be gone anyway so this is just pointless.”

“What are you talking about?” she laughed almost nastily, “as soon as he’s awake, you’ll be gone and we can all get back to our lives!”

Kitty stared at her for a long moment, face unreadable, and Hermione had to decency to look ashamed. She felt like she’d lost the ability to breathe, Hermione’s words had been like a punch in the stomach, it had hurt, she hadn’t been expecting it and now she was confused, and angry.

“You are such a bitch,” she said in a low voice, feeling very much like she wanted to smack her in the face, “no wonder he had to get away.”

Hermione reeled back in shock and everyone looked unsure of what to say. Kitty, still feeling like Hermione’s words had opened up this gaping, painful hole within her, set her jaw, ready to fight. But soon realised she couldn’t handle it right at that moment and instead strode forward, pushing through the group and marching down onto the lawns.

After a few seconds she broke into a run, well aware of the five pairs of eyes boring into her back, not stopping until she reached a slippery slope down to a large lake. When she reached the shores edge, she flopped onto the floor, staring at the lake for some time. Hermione’s words had hurt, not because she had been vindictive, but because it was probably true. She had been thinking about nothing but getting out since she’d arrived, and always her plan had included Harry by



her side. But now, as days went by, she'd realised she was probably running a fools errand. These people weren't going to let Harry go, and they weren't going to let her stay. The time would soon come when she'd be escorted out of the school, back to Surrey, away from Harry and everything she lived for.

She felt so alone, friendless, everyone here hated her, or abided her. They were just waiting for Harry to wake up, so he could say his goodbye. She needed to think of a way that would let her stay with Harry, but the only thing that came to mind was trying run away again, and it hadn't exactly worked perfectly the first time around. She cradled her face in her hands for some time, pushing at her eyes with the heel of her hand, relishing the bright colours and swirls she could see in the darkness – anything to get her mind off what was happening all around her.

She looked up suddenly, startled by the sound of the bird, but it was nowhere in sight. Looking around her suspiciously, she rubbed her face quickly, trying to dry her eyes and appear alert and awake. But there was no one around, only her and her shadow. She gave a sniff and looked at the inky black water of the lake, thoughts still with Harry and her impossible situation.

After a few moments she pulled off her shoes, placing them neatly beside her, before whipping off her socks too. She pushed them inside her shoes and stood up, wincing as the shingle of the bank pressed into the soles of her feet. She walked down to the lake shore, standing in the shallows and shivering as the water lapped over her feet. It was freezing cold, she could hardly believe it was the middle of summer, with the sun hiding just behind the summer storm clouds.

Here it just felt like winter.

Tonks and Remus were walking over to Harry's bed, both standing over him and looking down, thoughtful, worried expressions on their faces. They were still discussing his situation.

"What could it be?" asked Tonks, staring down at Harry's pale, still form.

He'd been in the hospital wing for nearly four days now and had made almost no improvement. In fact, she seriously doubted that he was any better off here than in the muggle hospital.

"I just don't know," said Remus, "Madam Pomfrey hasn't been able to find anything."

"I know that," tried Tonks, feeling bad for saying anything against the Matron, "It's just...I thought he'd be awake by now..."

"Yes, so did I, and so did she," sighed Remus, as Tonks sat down on the long bench that had been brought in from the Entrance Hall and placed next to Harry's bed.

She looked up to him, worried frown on her face and he sat down next to her. She couldn't help but feel her heart flutter slightly at this, but gave nothing away, staring impassively instead at the tiled floor.

"Maybe he really needs this rest?" suggested Remus after the short silence, "he's been through a lot by the looks of things, maybe his bodies just catching up?"

"Yeah, maybe...Or perhaps, but then if you think about it..." Tonks began, before rubbing her face wearily, "you know, I'm just so tired at the moment, I can't think straight..."

"Well you're not getting any proper rest are you – either here or on duty," he said, a worried expression settling onto his face, as if he'd just realised.

"I'm getting plenty," she told him, batting away his concern although her stomach had gave a pleasant lurch to see his worry.

"When was the last time you ate properly?" he demanded, voice full of concern now.

"Oh, er, this morning," she guessed vaguely, looking across to Harry to try and hide her flushed cheeks.

“Liar,” he teased slightly and Tonks cursed herself for letting her feelings climb to close to the surface.

There was a momentary silence when he should have spoke and she slowly looked across curiously. He was staring at the floor as if doing some serious thinking, but then suddenly looked across towards her. Their eyes met and no command from her brain would tell her heart to calm down.

“Well, in that case...” he began, sounding very unsure of himself, “maybe -”

“MADAME POMFREY!”

The sudden yell from the corridor caused them to both jump from their seat with a start, already on their feet as the Matron bustled out of her office, looking alert. Tonks and Remus had just joined her side when Hagrid burst in through the doors, carrying something and looking ashen faced.

Tonks looked at the bundle he held in his arms, realising with a start she could see a pale, limp arm dangling from inside it. She ran forward with the other two, who had also seen the arm and were looking grim, yet slightly panicked.

“I found her in the lake,” said Hagrid, voice panic stricken and tearful, “I heard splashing and the squid was pushing her to the edge...”

“Who?” Madam Pomfrey was demanding, pushing Hagrid over to an empty bed.

He stooped over the bed and held out his arms, the lifeless body rolling onto the sheets. Tonks felt like all the wind had been knocked out of her stomach.

“ Not Cathy...” she whispered, looking down at the soaking, bloodless face.

Madame Pomfrey pushed past her, as she went into business mode and Tonks could do nothing but stumble backwards, unable to comprehend that it was Kitty in front of her. She looked across to Remus, whose expression showed none of the shock she felt, but all of the worry. After a few moments, he shuffled forward.

“Is she...” he began, before trailing off and studying Kitty’s face in a sudden bout of confusion.

“Miss Tonks, fetch me some Pepper-Up from my office,” barked Madam Pomfrey in reply, “it’ll warm her up at least...”

She hadn’t even finished her request before Tonks was running away and Remus stepped forwards again, uncertain of what to do.

“What can I do?”

“Dry her clothes,” came the reply.

He quickly obliged and stood back to let Madam Pomfrey work, casting a few test charms over the girl. Remus alternately watched the coloured puffs and clouds, unable to interpret them as the Matron could, before sliding his gaze to Kitty. Her skin was the colour of alabaster, her lips standing out bright blue against it, looking almost comically out of place. Her usually wild hair was tangled and matted around her now it was dry and she was taking only small shallow breathes.

He looked down to her feet, noting her shoes and socks were missing before the obvious question sprung to mind; what was she doing in the lake? However, Tonks had come skidding back to the bedside, holding the bottle of potion impatiently and Madam Pomfrey stood back and looked across to them.

“I can revive her now, with the potion and a bit of rest she’ll be ok. It looks like her body must have gone into shock against the cold...”

They both nodded mutely and the Matron turned to the teenager. With a muttered incantation Kitty’s chest heaved to life, coughing and

spluttering she rolled onto her side as she brought up half the lake. The spluttering and wheezing gradually calmed down and she lay on her back, shivering violently.

“Cathy – are you ok?” asked Tonks worriedly, and Remus was surprised to hear she sounded tearful.

She didn’t reply, too busy trying to blow on her hands with stuttered breath, which were shaking so violently she wasn’t getting anywhere. Madame Pomfrey moved forward, wand poised for work when Kitty’s harsh cry broke out across the silent ward.

“D-D-Don’-n-t,” she tried to say, blue lips numb and unable to properly form the words.

“What?” all three of them asked at the same time.

“N-No,” she stuttered again, making a feeble attempt to bat away the wand, “m-m-gik, n-no m’g-ik.”

“I need to stop these tremors Cathy,” the Matron tried in her most soothing voice, “if you’re not treated, you could get hyperthermia.”

She made a face that looked like she didn’t care if she did or not and Tonks blinked at her in astonishment.

“Cathy, I know you don’t like the magical world, but please...you’re sick, you need help...” she said in a choked voice, unaware that Remus was now staring at her.

“No!” she said forcefully as she could and Tonks looked to Madame Pomfrey for the next step.

“If a muggle refuses magical treatment, then the mediwitch or wizard has no choice but to adhere to their wishes,” she recited solemnly, looking like she bitterly resented what she was saying, “first rule of muggle-magic practice.”

“But she could die of hyperthermia!” cried Tonks loudly, “Please Cathy, reconsider! This is your life!”

The girl merely stared stolidly at the blankets, pulling them around her tightly, and rolling onto her side so all they could see was her back.

“Do something!” Tonks demanded of the Matron, still grasping the potion tightly.

“I can’t, its medical ethics Tonks, you know I-”

“I don’t care, just do it!” she argued loudly.

“Tonks,” said Remus soothingly, laying a hand on her arm, “calm down. She’s going to be ok, a bit of warmth and rest is probably the best thing for her.”

“No, it’s not!” she continued, only slightly placated by Remus’s gesture.

“Keep your voice down!” chided the Matron, in a loud voice herself, shooting a meaningful glance towards Harry then Kitty.

“No! Am I the only one who can see how stupid you’re being?”

“Miss Tonks,” cautioned the matron, “keep your voice down or you’ll have to leave.”

She made to answer back with a rude and insulting comment, when Remus, whose hand was still on her arm, gave it a slight squeeze and placed his hand on her other arm.

“Come on.”

He led her slightly protesting body over to the bench again, pushing her towards it so she fell into it with a thump. She felt so useless, everyone else was acting like this was nothing, like she’d refused cold medicine – how could they be so calm? Couldn’t they imagine

what Harry would do if anything happened to her, especially when she was in their care?

Didn't anybody else care?

"Tonks, you've got to calm down a bit," he began in a slow, meaningful voice, "you need to get yourself sorted out."

"How can you be so calm! She could die!" Tonks hissed back, offended by his words.

"She's not going to die," he assured her, "Madam Pomfrey doesn't seem to think it's too bad, I know she'd break the code if she had too..."

"But," she protested once again but he merely hushed her in silence.

He bent down onto his haunches so that he was eye level with her and looked around him as if for eavesdroppers.

"Listen Tonks, I know you've convinced yourself that your somehow responsible for Harry and Cathy, but none of this is down to you, ok?" he began, staring in her eyes with serious eyes, "You've not been out of hospital that long yourself, and I'm beginning to really worry about you..."

"I'm fine," she said, a little more harshly than she intended, "worry about them."

She gestured over to the bed beyond her, trying to tear her gaze away from his. She didn't like the fact her heart was beating madly for another reason other than the worry of the patient's conditions.

"I do. But I worry about you too," he said heavily, still maintaining eye contact, "you're so pale and tired looking all the time. You've lost so much weight since all this started, I haven't even seen you eat in the last week-"

"I have," she protested feebly.

“When?” he demanded, “if you’re not here in the hospital wing then you’re on duty for the Order or the Ministry.”

“I do eat,” she said, feeling as if every time he listen one of her ‘ailments’ it suddenly became aware.

She suddenly felt hungry, suddenly felt thirsty, her clothes seemed a bit baggier than usual and her eyelids felt so heavy. If she closed them now, she felt like they’d never open again...

“Cathy will be fine, we’ll make sure of that,” he reassured her, “and Harry’ll be awake any day now. Nothings going to happen with you gone for a few hours of rest. Any problems and I’m sure we’d be the first to know.”

“I know that,” she said, trying to make him understand, “but I have to be here...I’m the only one who knows what she feels like...”

“She’ll out-sleep you tonight,” he promised her, “now listen. Why don’t you come back to headquarters? You can have a decent meal, get some rest?”

“No,” she insisted weakly, trying to push away the thought of a warm bed and a bowl of soup.

“If you don’t come quietly,” he tried, a slightest glimmer of Sirius-like mischief in his eyes, “then I’ll just have to stun you.”

“I can’t,” she said, trying to resist his charms.

“Come on – I’ll cook you dinner? I do a mean lasagne,” he said, giving her a slight smile, “got to be more successful than my Shepard’s Pie?”

She grinned weakly at him, trying not to think about how long she’d dreamed about dinner with Remus. He knew he’d won when her smile spread and the light of rebellion died in her eyes and he



couldn't help but feel slightly pleased she'd said yes and gave her a grin.

"Right, then shall we go?" he suggested.

"Ok, let me just-" she began, looking quite alive for the first time in days, when a sudden noise cut her off.

"Tonks?" came a disembodied voice.

She felt her stomach plummeting faster than a lead balloon, not again, she thought desperately. She slowly raised her wrist to her mouth as the smile slid off Remus's face.

"Yeah?" she asked, hoping against hope they wouldn't...

"Gardiner didn't show up for her shift this afternoon, we need you down in the department now."

She felt like this devastating blow was an actual painful force against her. She made the gross mistake of looking at Remus at this point, whose face had gone down into emotional lockdown – no sign of what he was thinking or feeling was present now. She felt like she wanted to cry and could hardly speak when it came for her answer.

"I'll be there in a moment," she whispered, dropping her wrist to her lap.

After a few seconds of silence she pushed herself to her feet and Remus also stood up. She gathered her things together, pulling her travel cloak around her shoulders and trying to ignore the weariness of her bones, the ache of her muscles, her screaming headache.

"I'll see you tomorrow," she said glumly, trudging towards the door.

"Ok," she heard Remus say as she walked through it, squeezing her eyes shut painfully as a renegade tear squeezed out.

The morning after Kitty's expedition into the lake, Hermione and Ron were sat on the stand surrounding the Quidditch pitch, shivering in

the chill of a cool summer's day. They had only just heard the news about Kitty, having only just arrived and being informed by Mrs Weasley, who had got her daily status report before heading off to do some unknown task he wasn't allowed to know about.

"Do you think she tried to top herself?" Ron asked after he felt the silence had gone on too long.

"Ron!" cried Hermione indignantly, "don't be so...so uncaring!"

"You're one to talk," he retaliated, "you don't even like her! I bet it was what you said yesterday what did it."

"Oh Ron, don't say that," she moaned, fingers spread across her face.

"What?" he muttered, "it's probably true...you weren't exactly nice to her about it, were you?"

"Well, she just got me so angry!" she protested, sounding mortified, "I tried to be nice, but she was just so...rude. Honestly Ron, the first thing that pops into my head when I think about her is Slytherin."

"Well, Harry likes her," he said, sounding embarrassed, "she can't be all bad..."

"Maybe Harry's changed then," she said, sounding unconvinced and worried, "because the girl we met yesterday was nobody Harry would even bother speaking to, let alone date."

"Maybe that's not what she's normally like?" suggested Ron hopelessly, "maybe she's quite nice, you know, once you get to know her."

"Maybe..." said Hermione, looking off into the distance, "do you really think it was what I said that made her go in the lake?"

"It might not be..." he said, answering her question honestly.

“Oh Ron, I’m such a horrible person,” she wailed, burying her head in her arms.

“You’re not Hermione,” he said awkwardly, patting her on the back inexpertly when she began to cry.

“Oh I am! I’ve got to apologise!” she said suddenly, sitting bolt upright, mad look in her eyes.

“What now?” Ron demanded, feeling unsteady at her sudden change.

“Yes! Right now!”

She got up and marched away, leaving Ron sat on the benches looking slightly baffled.

“Mad,” he said, shaking his head and getting up and following her. Kitty had slipped into a deep depression. Everywhere she looked she could see no way out – every scenario ended in her being sent away. They wouldn’t let her come to this school and study magic, she was sure there must be some rules about it. She couldn’t go back to Surrey, her father was locked up now and her brothers would literally kill her if they got wind of her reappearance. She couldn’t go back to her life, there was nothing left there for her.

In that moment she made a shocking decision, if they did send her away, she’d kill herself. What was the point in living? She realised in some small way that she was being morbid and overdramatic, but she didn’t care, she’d never truly believed anything as much as she did that fact. It was all or nothing. Life couldn’t be so crap to her that it would make the past two weeks the only happiness she was allowed.

She wondered that if she told Tonks that, it would make them let her stay. Surely they didn’t want her death on their hands? Her vindictive, conniving thoughts ran around her head as she lost track of time, not even knowing if it was morning or evening, thinking nothing but black thoughts.

She heard the curtain to her bay swishing aside and someone walking in quietly, probably Remus or Tonks to see her again. She didn't think she could stand to see that pity in their eyes, that look that said it all – we know its shit and there's nothing we can do about it. Pity was even worse than the hate she was getting off everyone else, she could deal with hate, she was good at hate.

Kitty stared at the curtain ahead, her cocoon of quilts around her head pressing against her ears as she tried to shut the world out.

"Hello..." came an unsure, vaguely familiar voice, "Cathy..."

She tried to place where she'd heard it before, searching the curtain ahead of her as if it would help. Then it clicked.

"What are you talking about? As soon as he's awake, you'll be gone and we can get back to all our lives!"

Hermione her mind hissed at her, fucking Hermione.

"Are you awake?" came the voice again – it was timid, shy, as if she was worried Kitty was about to roar out at her.

She seriously considered doing this, but her mood had sapped all her energy, so she remained still.

"Is she awake?" came a second voice.

She wasn't sure, but she thought it might be Ron's. She'd only heard him say one word before but the voice seemed to suit him.

"Yes," said Kitty through gritted teeth.

There was an unsure pause and Kitty prayed to whatever God was upstairs to make them turn around and leave – she would have done if she were them, hearing that tone of voice. However, her luck continued on its usual form when Hermione moved into view, standing right in front of her.

“Do you mind?” said Kitty in as evil voice as she could muster, “you’re ruining my view.”

Something flickered across the girls face. Kitty couldn’t be sure, but it looked like a hint of anger, of rebellion. Instead of leaving however, Hermione merely dragged one of the chairs across the floor and plonked herself into it, rather resolutely, smack bang in her line of sight.

“Please?” asked Kitty almost nicely, deciding to try a different tack, “I’m tired and feel like shit anyway, without your helpful comments.”

Hermione looked into her hands, blushing deeply and looking intensely ashamed. Kitty’s attention was caught and she tried to focus her eyes on them a little better. Ron was pulling over another seat, sitting next to Hermione looking far more unsure of himself than her, casting worried looks at the girl next to him.

“I know you hate me, and if I’m honest, I don’t much like you either,” said Hermione finally, looking slightly surprised at the words that were coming out of her mouth, “but we’ve still got Harry in common, and I want to know why that is.”

Kitty stared at her for some time, trying to bite back her tongue and instead imaging all the lovely horrible things she could say to this girl.

“Can I ask you what happened yesterday?” Hermione asked and Kitty looked away resolutely.

“When?”

“When you brought in here...why you were in the lake?” she asked, leaning forward and giving her an uncertain, yet coaxing face.

“I fancied a swim,” she replied stoutly.

She still felt cold, it had hit her like a sudden shower of knives, it felt as if she’d just pushed out of a cliff, all the air had left her lungs until

she couldn't breathe anymore. She remember the feeling of breathing water through her nose, the way her legs had seemed to stop working, brain screaming commands the body was ignoring. And she remembered being lifted up, being carried...her guardian angel maybe.

"It must be about 3 degrees in that lake – even in summer," said Ron, a look of something approaching awe on his face.

"I didn't think of that," snapped Kitty, drawing the blankets around her tighter, she had the shivers again.

"I went in there once too," supplied Ron, talking to a point over Kitty's shoulder with red tipped ears, "for this competition, but I was asleep at the time – Harry had to swim down to the bottom and get me out..."

He trailed off when he saw Kitty staring at him as if he'd suddenly grown three heads.

"It was for this magical competition..." he muttered, looking to Hermione for help.

"And how did you breathe?" she asked almost sarcastically.

"We were put in this kind of, erm, enchanted sleep?" he hazarded, waiting to see if she understood, but she merely stared, "Well, basically we had this bubble of air around our heads..."

"And that's how Harry swam?" she said slowly.

"Well no, he ate this stuff called Gillyweed, it gives you gills and you're able to swim and everything..."

"He turned into a fish?" she repeated in a dull voice, obviously not believing a word he'd said.

"Yeah," he said, before looking across to Hermione again.

They both shared a look that said they were both well aware the meeting wasn't going well.

"That doesn't matter anyway," brushed off Hermione, turning back to Kitty with an unsure look on her face, "I'm sure Harry would have told you that if it was important."

"And what is that supposed to mean?" she snapped.

"Nothing! Just that if it was important I'm sure he would have told you," said Hermione, looking almost panicked at her reaction.

"Listen just because I didn't know about this place and magic doesn't mean I didn't know him, you know," she said angrily, "so don't you sit there on your high horses spouting all that sort of shit."

"There isn't any Harry outside the magical world," said Hermione almost pleadingly, "don't you understand?"

Kitty reeled back slightly, for the first time feeling like she had some sort of a glimpse into Harry's reasons for leaving, even his best friends couldn't see past the magic...

"No, it's you that doesn't understand," said Kitty, small grin playing on her lips as her mind went over the facts, "you think you know Harry don't you?"

"I know that I know Harry," countered Hermione in a hard voice.

"If you know him so well, what's his favourite meal at MacDonalds? What's his choice of alcohol in a pub? What's his favourite movie?" she asked them triumphantly, grinning at Hermione's unsure expressions and Ron's lost look.

"You think you're so smart," said Hermione, angry patches of red on her pale cheeks now, "but you're forgetting the Harry that you know doesn't even exist."

Kitty reeled back slightly, feeling herself unexpectedly hurt by what she'd just said.

"He doesn't belong in your world, don't you get that? Everything you did, everything about him you knew, it's nothing but an illusion," she said, looking her dead in the eye, "a way for him to get away from everything that's happening here."

Kitty looked away, gulping down and setting her chin firmly before giving Hermione the coldest glare she could manage.

"Well, if that's what you really think then maybe that's the reason I'm the only person Harry trusted in the world," she spat, "Because if you can't see Harry as anything more than some magical person unable to be anything but your hero, then, you really don't know him at all!"

"You've known him for less than three weeks," said Hermione, angry now, "I've been his best friend for five years. We've been through more with him than you can ever possibly imagine!"

"So I don't count is that it?" hissed Kitty as Ron made a shushing motion with his hands, "just some stupid muggle, that's what you call us right? Some girl Harry's met. That you don't like, so you're going to get rid of me just like that? Well, sorry to disappoint you, but I'm not going to let that happen."

"You haven't got a choice," said Hermione, crossing her arms angrily.

Kitty gritted her teeth, sick to death of this girl and this conversation now, but it wasn't just that, she was angry with what she was saying, hurt even. Suddenly it all became too much for her and she couldn't stand to look at the two people in front of her and if they weren't going to leave her, then she'd leave them. She slid out of bed suddenly, dragging the blanket with her and wrapping it around her shivering form.

"What you guys all seem to be forgetting, is that I am the only reason your precious magical Harry is still alive! How do you think he



escaped? I didn't see any of you lot there helping him, defending him? You didn't have to stand and watch him being stabbed! You didn't have to drag his bleeding body across two fields and a fucking forest to the nearest road to steal a car to save him, did you? And I bet you've never been tortured, just for someone else's fun?"

The two watched her open mouthed, horror etched on their face as she shivered and swayed in front of them.

"So, tell me again, who are you to say that I don't deserve to be with him too?"

And with that she spun on her heel and marched towards the door, still cocooned in her blanket, bare feet padding across the tile floor.

"Cathy, wait," exclaimed Hermione, and there was the sounds of two chairs being hastily pushed aside and them following her.

"Leave me alone!" she hissed back, passing the foot of Harry's bed and giving him a quick look, still out cold and unaware of the turmoil he'd created.

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean to say those things, I'm just-" she began desperately, "I'm just upset..."

"WELL HOW DO YOU THINK I FEEL?" she practically yelled, whipping around to them angrily.

"I don't – I can't..." she spluttered tearfully.

"No you can't! So don't even fucking bother! Just keep out of my way, before I do something Harry would regret!"

She stormed off towards the door, where Remus had been standing, obviously watching the entire exchange. He had the strangest look on his face and he stared at Ron and Hermione for a long moment before smiling at Kitty, who was stood in front of him shivering.

“You shouldn’t go outside Cathy,” he told her in a soothing voice, “it’s too cold for you.”

She gave an angry sigh and merely sidestepped Remus, continuing down the corridor.

“Cathy?” he tried.

“I need a fag!” she yelled back, before kicking out at a suit of armour, which came crashing down to the ground.

The three figures flinched and after a moment Remus turned back to Ron and Hermione, who had the decency to look ashamed of themselves. Remus merely walked forwards and came to a rest in front of them.

“I’m going to have to order you to stop bothering her,” he said finally, “as you seem unable to hold your tongue around her and display a little bit of gratitude and sympathy. Like she said, if it was not for her then Harry would be dead – do you understand that?”

“Yes Professor Lupin,” they said in unison, obviously highly embarrassed.

“And do you understand what she had to do, what she had to sacrifice to do that?” he continued calmly, “No, you can’t possibly imagine. And I’m sorry if you feel annoyed Harry ran away, but you can’t blame her for anything. If anything, you should be thanking her on bended knee because you’ve been given a second chance – most people don’t get that.”

“Yes Sir,” they whispered, staring at their feet.

“Good. Now if you want to be here, sit quietly with Harry, and if you can’t be civil around her, then I suggest you go home, ok?”

“Yes Sir.”

“Sorry Sir,” said Hermione tearfully, looking at him for the first time, “I don’t mean to be horrible to her... I just don’t understand why all this has happened...”

“Neither do I Hermione,” he admitted sadly, looking over to Harry, “but thanks to Cathy, we’re going to find out.”

She nodded mutely and Remus gave a smile, happy in the knowledge he had safely averted what could have been a potentially serious situation. Without a word he turned on his heel and walked back of the hospital wing, gingerly stepping over the suit of armour that was now searching sightlessly for his head, which had rolled across to the corridor after Kitty’s attack.

When he emerged into the chilly air from the great double doors he looked around to see Kitty sitting on the side of the wall, still wrapped in a blanket as her feet dangled dangerously over the drop. Every now and again a plume of smoke would arise around her before disappearing on the wind. He gave himself a confidence boosting shake of the head before walking over to where she was sitting, leaning his elbows onto the ledge and looking at the view with her. She looked down at him and made an angry noise in the back of her throat.

“Can I please go more than ten minutes without being insulted or shouted at?” she asked in a harsh voice, taking a deep inhalation of her cigarette.

“I’m here to do neither,” he said calmly, “just enjoying the view. It’s not my fault if you just so happen to be here.”

She looked at him for a long moment and Remus fancied he could see a slight smile out of the corner of his eye.

“Don’t you know I’m the she-Devil? Personally responsible for corrupting and kidnapping Harry?” she said in an airy voice, “According to you lot I probably sacrifice live chickens too.”

Remus gave a chuckle, "Well you don't look like any she-Devil I've come across, and I know you didn't corrupt and kidnap Harry either – he was corrupted long before you came along."

Kitty gave a surprised laugh, unable to stop it before it came out and after an interested pause she fell silent and studied him properly.

"But I do believe them about the chickens," he joked, looking across to her to find her give a happy grin.

"It's a hobby really," she said, looking off to the distance again and giving a brief laugh, "the big money's in beef."

She fell silent again and Remus found himself feeling almost pleased with himself, besides Tonks, Kitty hadn't spoken to anyone with a civil tongue since she'd arrived and he thought that maybe he'd made a good impression.

"So what do you like doing when you're not sacrificing chickens?" he asked conversationally as she lit up a second cigarette.

"Enticing boys away from their friends generally," she said with a slight smirk, "they just can't say no to the prospect of greasy fast food and my wit and charm."

"Oh, is that was all this is supposed to be is it? Wit and charm?" he asked in mock-surprise to which she gave a surprised yet secretly pleased look.

"I don't like to broadcast my own magical powers, so I'll thank you to keep it on the low?" she said conspiratorially.

"I'll remember that," he chuckled and she looked at him again.

"So, you're a bit different aren't you?"

"I'm sorry?" he asked in polite confusion.

“Well, you seem a lot cooler than the rest of the guys around here,” she said with a shrug.

“Well, I’ve always been cool,” he said in mock-superiority, “no secret there.”

“Oh yeah,” she tutted with a laugh, “I said cooler than the guys around here, you do realise you’re being compared to idiots and bigots?”

“We’re not that bad,” he said quietly, “I know you’ve seen nothing but the worst side of everyone since you arrived, but I’m afraid that this situation is more serious than I think you realise. Even if I told you, I don’t think you’d understand, most of the time I don’t understand myself.”

“Sounds familiar,” she muttered, “have you ever stopped to think, that maybe you should stop seeing Harry as some kind of weapon, some excuse or whatever? I don’t know what you expect him to do.”

“Yes, I have,” admitted Remus and Kitty stared at him, obviously having expected him to deny it vehemently like the others, “I knew something had to give way after Sirius died if Harry was going to be able to get over it.”

“We’re you friends with Harry’s godfather?” she asked him, sucking on her cigarette as she studied his reactions.

“We were best friends at school, me, Sirius and James – Harry’s dad,” he agreed, heart constricting painfully.

“You’re forgetting Peter,” she said, looking out across to the mountains and now it was Remus’ turn to stare.

“How did you know about Peter?” he asked blankly.

“I had the displeasure of meeting him,” she said after a slight pause.

“So he’s still alive...” he muttered, almost to himself, before giving her a slight glance, “how much do you know about him?”

“That he’s a dick,” she said flatly, to which Remus gave a small smile, “that he betrayed Harry’s parents, that he set up Sirius...he was my guard...the bastard.”

She gave a half-hearted laugh and Remus nodded heavily.

“But I know all about you lot,” she said finally, “Harry didn’t talk about his life a lot, he seemed to like just being in the present most of the time. But he talked about Sirius a lot...more than anyway else.”

“I thought he probably would,” said Remus sadly, “he never wanted to speak to anyone here about it...”

“Because he felt so guilty,” said Kitty and Remus looked at her in surprise. “Yeah, he told me how he died, although I guess the details are probably a bit different. Harry had nightmares every night about it, it seemed to be all he ever thought about most of the time - kept saying he thought he was going mad.”

“Did he?” asked Remus, unpleasantly surprised by this, “I knew he’d take it badly, obviously...but I didn’t realise it affected him so much...”

“Harry hides stuff well,” said Kitty, slight edge to her tone, “but sometimes he lets you see him...”

Remus and Kitty fell silent and for a long while they both studied the view, deep in their own thoughts. Remus felt like he’d suddenly seen not only Harry, but also Kitty in a new light. Got a glimpse into their relationship. He knew for certain now that Kitty truly loved Harry, despite everything, and perhaps for the first time realised why he ran away with her.

“This has been really hard on you Cathy,” he said finally, looking across the girl who was staring glumly ahead, “I’m sorry.”

“Not your fault,” she replied in a faraway voice, “just life I guess...It’s all shit, right?”

Remus frowned deeply, he could tell that Kitty really believed that and couldn’t believe how much she sounded like Tonks when she was depressed.

She gave a sudden humourless laugh, “You know what...I think I preferred Harry’s old life more.”

“I understand,” he said, studying the girl, “but I don’t want you thinking there’s no place in this new one for you, despite what Hermione might say.”

Kitty gave a snort of disgust, violently pulling another cigarette out of her pack, her last.

“That girl,” Kitty began, before losing her cool and shaking her head, “that girl is unbelievable, you know? I can’t stand her!”

“And yet, Harry chose both of you, became close to you,” mused Remus almost to himself, “Hermione might have her faults, as you obviously have gathered. But you’ve got to remember that she’s going through exactly the same as you-”

“Oh I doubt it,” she muttered.

“-Except she hasn’t seen or heard a word of his whereabouts for two weeks, we all thought anything could be happening to him, and now he’s still ill,” continued Remus as if he hadn’t heard, “Hermione and Ron are Harry’s oldest friends, and they look after one another as if they were brother and sister.”

“If they’re so close why did he leave?” she demanded pointedly.

“It didn’t have anything to do with them,” said Remus, “Harry left for his own reasons. They’re both close to him-”

“But they don’t love him do they!” she burst out angrily.

Remus looked across to her in surprise and she silently looked away, fuming to herself.

“Do you?” he asked seriously.

She didn't reply for a long moment and Remus was amazed to find he already knew the answer, and what this would mean. Finally Kitty looked across to him and with an extremely guarded look on her face, shrugged her shoulders.

“Depends really,” she said thoughtfully.

“On what?”

“On whether you love Tonks.”

If it were possible to do a double take on hearing a line, Remus would have done it right then. He found himself staring at the girl, mouth hanging open at the unexpected question.

“I'm sorry?” he asked her incredulously.

“You heard me...” she said, grinning at his expression, “Do you love Tonks?”

“I-” he began, sounding completely taken aback still, “I couldn't possibly know where to begin to answer that question.”

“Well, we agree on something then,” she said, looking supremely pleased with herself.

“Well...” he said, unsure of what he could possibly say now.

“Well indeed,” she replied, finishing off her last cigarette, “that's my quota for this psychotic episode, better keep a few spare in case Hermione has another go – see you later.”



She hopped off the wall and disappeared through the double doors leaving Remus staring after her, open mouthed and inexplicably stunned.

AN/ Another quick update! Can you tell I've got tons of work to do and am procrastinating! I have an excuse anyway, am stricken by the dreaded flu so my characters are the only people I can be with without infecting! Lol.

So what do you think? Don't shout at me for keeping Harry out of it, times the best healer as they say! What I'm most interested in is hearing your reactions to Ron and Hermione's reaction? Realistic? How would you feel if you were them and met Kitty? Lols.

Please review! Everyone! Even if its just to tell me it was crap!

P.S. Kitty has dreadlocks but i often call them braids because the two are interchanagable in my head! Lols.

## Chapter Twenty Three

You Got To Go To The Lonesome Valley,  
You Got To Go There By Yourself,  
Nobody Else Can Go For You,  
You Got To Go There By Yourself.

Kitty slid the tape into the VCR and climbed back onto the sofa, snuggling into Harry's shoulder as she played with the remote for a few moments.

"This is my all-time favourite, number one film," she told him happily.

"You said that about the one we watched last night," he replied, as it began to play, "and the night before that as well."

"Yeah well," she grinned at him, "this time I mean it."

"And I'm sure you said that last night when I pointed it out," he said, wrapping his arm around her as they shuffled to get comfy.

"Shut it you," she said playfully, "just watch and enjoy."

"What is it?"

"The credits just came up," she reminded him with a roll of the eyes, "it's The Shining."

"The Shining?"

"Yeah, come on Harry, everybody's heard of The Shining," she laughed, "Jack Nicolson? The Overview Hotel? Room 237? Redrum?"

"Oh yeah, that one..." he said vaguely, and Kitty watched him with a smile on her face, "haven't seen it for years...."

“All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy,” she said in an ominous voice.

He frowned at her.

“Quote Harry.”

He gave a small smile and they settled down into the sofa, the rest of the conversation was slightly lost on Kitty, she was definitely talking to Harry, and he was replying, but what were they saying? Was it even in English? For some reason it didn't seem to worry her and she remembered turning to him and kissing him lightly on the lips.

“What was that for?” he asked with a grin a few moments later.

“For coming back,” she replied happily, “where did you go?”

“Been to see a man about a dog,” he said cheekily and she nudged him playfully.

“That's my saying not yours!” Kitty told him and he merely bobbed his tongue out at her.

“I don't believe you have copyright on it.”

The colours of the room seemed to shift for a second, and odd coloured lights overtook the usual background of Donna's flat. None of this seemed to effect her or Harry though.

“Where did you really go Harry?” she asked him after the colours seemed to fade away, “Honestly.”

“Honestly?” he asked her, eyebrow raised, “A long way away.”

“Did you like it there?”

He frowned slightly, “No...I didn't...”

“Why did you stay for so long then?” she demanded worriedly.

“Because I was safe,” he replied quietly, “for a bit.”

“Who from?”

Harry was about to reply when he looked up past her - eyes widening in fear suddenly. Time seemed to slow down as Kitty turned and saw a man swathed in a long, dark red robe - the colour of which was mirrored in his snake-like eyes. He reached out and now she was being pushed off the sofa, then scrambling to her feet to see a long blade being plunged into Harry's chest.

The scream ripped out of her throat and suddenly she was sitting upright, dark Hospital Wing pressing down upon her as she gasped. The realisation that it was all just a dream did nothing to make it any less terrifying, did nothing to stop her heart thumping against her chest or her hands shake.

She was still sat up in bed, bed sheet clutched to her when a lantern came swinging towards her, closely followed by the Matron, hair in curlers and dressing gown tied around her waist with a blue sash.

“Is everything ok Cathy?” she asked anxiously, “I heard you shouting?”

“Just...just a nightmare,” she managed to stammer, before catching herself and trying to appear more collected, “nothing to bother about...I'm fine.”

“Are you sure? Would you like something to help you get back off to sleep?” asked the woman.

“No,” she insisted forcibly, “I'm fine.”

The Matron regarded her for a second, before nodding and retreating away from her bed towards the office. When Kitty was sure she was out of sight, she sagged from her uptight position and allowed herself a few moments to let the fear wash over her. She looked over

towards Harry, seeing only the black shape of his outline in the darkness, trying not to remember the sound her imagination had created of the knife plunging into his skin...

She lay down onto her pillows once more, eyes firmly locked on Harry, wondering if wherever he was he was dreaming too.

Harry wasn't exactly dreaming. Wasn't awake, wasn't asleep, wasn't dead...but was still aware. Aware enough to be sat down on something, staring out at the featureless, endless blackness in front of him. Time didn't seem to feature here, or at least, he didn't have any concept of it passing. He'd been here seconds, but sometimes it felt like years.

He glanced briefly to his right and looked at the large black, shaggy haired dog sitting next to him, also just watching the space ahead of them. It was nice to know he was there at least, almost comforting he thought as he turned back to the blackness too, wrapping his arms around his knees and waiting.

Always waiting.

Tonks wandered across the grounds of Hogwarts, reading through the parchment in her hands feeling half elated, half miserable. She managed to get her boss at Azkaban to give her an advance on next months wages and it was almost enough to pay off this weeks debt repayments when she added it to her bonus she'd got from the Auror Department for her successful capture of a Death Eater the other night. She was glad she could pay a bit off, but how was she going to survive next week? Next month?

"Wotcher Tonks."

Tonks jumped slightly, looking around to find Kitty sat on the ground, back against the stairs up to the castle.

"Wotcher Cathy," she grinned, giving a slight laugh at Kitty's perfect imitation of her accent, "what are you doing sitting down there?"

Kitty gave a vague shrug, "Not a lot."

Tonks noticed the girl looked very pale, slight smudges under her eyes which made her think she'd not got much sleep the previous night. In fact she looked just how Tonks felt, completely shattered.

"I'm beginning to think we should move your bed out here," she laughed, easing herself onto the floor next to her, to which Kitty gave a lightly surprised look.

"Yeah well," said the girl, giving another awkward shrug, "it's more normal out here."

"I guess," Tonks said, remembering the girls dislike of the ghosts and portraits.

"Harry's not awake," she replied in a muted voice, "still."

Tonks frowned deeply, she didn't know what she could say to the girl that would make the fact that Harry's way still out cold any better. She didn't have a clue what was wrong with him, none of them did.

"I don't know Cathy...we're missing something..." she said awkwardly, "I just can't think what it could be...But we're trying."

"I know," she replied quietly, wrapping her arms around her knees now, "but you should be doing better."

Tonks watched her for a moment, she had a small, plastic covered book on the ground next to her and a pencil lying beside it.

"Have you been writing?" she asked curiously.

"Not really..." she said, pushing the book out of Tonks sight, "just...you know...doodling."

Tonks nodded quickly and looked away, unaccustomed to seeing Kitty looking so dejected and downbeat, none of the anger or fire that she usually ran on seemed to be present today.

"Are you ok Cathy?" she asked worriedly.

“I’m fine,” she said vaguely, “Just...a little tired I guess.”

“Do you want to go get some sleep?”

“Not really,” she replied flatly and Tonks wondered how the girl was sleeping.

“Are you sure you’re ok?” she prodded.

“Yeah, of course,” replied Kitty, trying to joke, “it’s probably just lack of nicotine and alcohol. I don’t think I’ve gone this long before.”

Tonks sniggered at the girl, pulling her bag forwards, “Well. I can’t help you with the alcohol, but I do have something for you...”

Tonks reached into her bag and pulled out a small box, shaking them at the girl.

“Fags!” she said, grinning suddenly as she reached out for them, “you’re a shiny, shiny star!”

“Don’t tell the Madame Pomfrey I gave them to you,” said Tonks ruefully, “Remus told me you’d run out yesterday.”

“I shall take your secret to the grave,” she said solemnly, before grinning, “best present I’ve ever been bought! Now if only you could fix my walkman we’d be going somewhere!”

“Walkman?” asked Tonks curiously.

“My CD player,” elaborated Kitty, already lighting up a cigarette and inhaling deeply, “wont work, keeps coming out all crackly, I think I must have broken it...”

“Oh, no that’s the magic - interferes with electricity and that sort of thing,” Tonks said with a laugh as Kitty rolled her eyes.

“Should have guessed it would be something like that,” she complained, “I’ve never gone this long in my whole life without listening to music! Harry used to say he was going to cut the power to the flat, just to get some quiet.”

Tonks sniggered appreciatively, “I’ll take a look at it if you want, there’s probably a spell somewhere that’ll let it work. In the meantime, I’ve got you some magazines and stuff to keep you occupied? Didn’t know what you’d like so I got a selection.”

Kitty whooped with joy as Tonks handed her a stack of glossy magazines.

“Oh cool, Empire! My favourite,” laughed Kitty, pulling one out, “has all the latest movies and stuff, I like to disagree with their reviews. We went and saw one they gave five stars to the other day and it was complete shit-”

Kitty broke off suddenly, giving a slight laugh, “Suppose you don’t actually have a clue what I’m talking about, do you?”

“I do go to the movies you know,” Tonks replied easily, “not very often any more to be honest, my dad’s a big sci-fi buff, likes all that apocalypse and alien stuff.”

Kitty grinned, flicking through the magazine happily, “Thanks a lot Tonks, I’ve been in this weirdness for so long I began to worry the real world didn’t exist anymore!”

Tonks merely laughed before settling into an easy conversation with the girl, who seemed much more animated now. She pulled out another cigarette and lit up, slouching against the wall looking much more relaxed as she hinted at bad dreams the night before and Tonks tried to keep her on safe subjects of conversation. At all times they skirted around the topic of Harry, occasionally mentioning him but neither of them really knowing how to approach talking about him.

They were just laughing as Tonks recounted a funny story about the time she’d inflated her boyfriend Charlie’s head to twice its normal



size for forgetting their anniversary when the smile slipped off Kitty's face. Tonks frowned and turned to see what it was she was looking at when she saw Mrs Weasley striding across the grounds, gaggle of various Weasley's following her.

"Wotcher Molly," said Tonks brightly when she noticed her and Kitty sitting on the floor.

"Hello Tonks," she said with a brittle smile, eyes sliding across Kitty for a moment, before looking back at Tonks, "how is he?"

"No change apparently," Tonks explained, noticing how Ron, Hermione and the Twins seemed to take a sudden interest in the shoes.

It was most unnerving to see the Twins behaving so docile and as Tonks exchanged pleasantries with Mrs Weasley for a few moments longer, she noticed the way Kitty was watching them suspiciously, magazine forgotten as she smoked slowly.

"Yes well, I think we should go in, it's too cold out here to be waiting around," she said, pointedly staring at both Tonks and Kitty sat on the floor for a moment.

Kitty merely stared back at her stolidly. The group quickly departed and Tonks tried to stifle the grin as she heard Molly muttering and caught the disgusted glare Ginny threw back over her shoulder in surprise. When she turned back to Kitty she saw she had an almost identical expression on her own face.

"Remus told me you don't get along?" Tonks said and Kitty gave her look.

"That's the understatement of the century," she scoffed, scowl on her face now, "they hate me."

"I'm sure they don't," Tonks said slightly awkwardly.

"Oh believe me, they do. And trust me, the feelings mutual."

"I can talk to them if you want?" she offered and Kitty gave her an incredulous look.

"Are you kidding? That's the last thing I want! I'm happy they hate me, and you talking to them isn't going to change their opinion of me. They all think I'm this bitch that led Harry off the tracks or kidnapped him away from you or something, and that's fine by me! But it's not the truth ok?"

Kitty was working herself up now and Tonks watched in semi-fascination at the sudden burst of anger.

"It wasn't my fault! When I met Harry he'd already been planning for ages, all I offered was company – I was running away anyway, it made sense to go together!" she ranted, "Is that so bad?"

"No it's not Cathy," said Tonks quietly, "and even if no one else accepts it, me and Remus both thank you for doing that for him. He needed something none of us could give him, needed someone...We'd all much rather have had someone with him than see him on his own..."

"Yeah well," she snorted, "now I feel much better - I must have been dead useful for you lot."

"Don't think like that Cathy," Tonks sighed heavily, "Ron and Hermione are just scared and upset and probably a little jealous - they've never had to share Harry before. And Molly? Well, she isn't that fond of me either, you learn to cope with that pretty quickly. As for Ginny, well..."

She broke off with a little laugh and Kitty frowned at her slightly.

"What?" she demanded.

"She's been in love Harry since she was 10," she explained, "so I guess she must really hate your guts for an entirely normal reason, magic's got nothing to do with it."

“She’s in love with Harry?” asked Kitty slowly, looking slightly pale now.

Tonks shrugged, “She thinks she is, and I suppose she’s had long enough to think about it.”

“Oh right...” said Kitty in a hollow voice before hesitating slightly, “Have her and Harry-”

“Not an issue,” cut in Tonks before this got too unpleasant, “Nothing more than friends, honestly. Ginny told me she’d lost hope last summer.”

“Ok...” said Kitty quickly, before studying her hands for a while, “You know...I can’t believe how little I know about him...”

Tonks sighed inwardly, these conversations should be going on between Kitty and Harry, not through her - she had no idea how Kitty must have been feeling, or thinking.

“Everyone has secrets,” suggested Tonks with a comforting smile, “right?”

Kitty gave this a moments thought before unexpectedly laughing as if at a past memory.

“Yeah, definitely.”

“And there’s plenty of time to find out the answers to all your questions,” she told her, “uncover a few more of Harry’s secrets, right?”

“Yeah, I guess,” she said, sounding unconvinced. “What’s your secret Tonks?”

She gave her a surprised look.

“What?”

“Well, you said everyone has secrets...what’s yours?” she repeated.

Tonks gave a slightly uncomfortable laugh, Kitty didn’t seem to realise that her question may have been inappropriate or even slightly rude.

“Well, the whole point of secrets is that people don’t know,” she replied easily and Kitty gave a slight laugh.

“Point taken,” she said and spent a few moments of silence as she searched for a new topic of conversation.

Tonks saw her eyes rest on the forbidden forest for a moment.

“Are there really creatures in the forest?” she asked curiously.

“Oh yeah, plenty. It’s out of bounds to students,” she explained, “Hagrid’s really the only one who goes in there now, it’s not really safe.”

“Who’s Hagrid?”

“He’s games keeper here,” Tonks told her, studiously avoiding reference to his half-giant status, “good friends with Harry since his first year...He’s the one who pulled you out of the lake.”

“Oh,” said Kitty in a far away voice, “and is it true about the Sagittarius?”

“The centaurs? Yeah, there’s plenty of them in there too, among other things.”

“Can they really predict the future?”

“Perhaps. They’ve been right in the past,” she said, wondering slightly about this line of inquiry, “although I never really believed very much in all that sort of stuff.”

“Yeah,” agreed Kitty, pausing slightly before, “are there werewolves in there too?”

Tonks remembered that she’d only just found out about Remus and tried to tread cautiously.

“You never know,” shrugged Tonks, “but full moons not till Friday.”

“And then will Remus change?”

Again the point blank question caught Tonks slightly off-guard, even though she’d been expecting it.

“Yes.”

“Is he dangerous?”

“He won’t be, he takes a special potion now...” she said awkwardly.

Every time full moon came around she had a horrible knot of anxiety in her stomach, worrying whether the potion wouldn’t work, if Remus would get hurt, if he’d be ok...He was always so ill...

“He’s cool isn’t he?” she said, pulling her knees up tight towards her, wrapping her arms around them.

“Yes, he is,” Tonks said as neutrally as she could, unable to stop a small smile forming on her lips.

“He’s always nice to me...and Harry,” she said, and Tonks tried to work out where she was going with the conversation.

“Well, he’s worried about you, he knows what its like to be the outsider,” said Tonks, giving her an apologetic smile, “and he’s the closest thing Harry’s got to family now I guess – apart from the Weasley’s.”

“I don’t understand,” said Kitty slowly, “why Harry ran away. So many people here love him and would take care of him...why does he need me?”

“He needs you,” said Tonks solemnly, remembering all her conversations with Cassandra, “more than I think you’ll ever know...”

Kitty was silent for a moment, obviously deep in thought, and Tonks marvelled at how different she was now from when she’d first arrived at Hogwarts.

“It doesn’t feel like it,” she admitted in a quiet voice.

“Listen Cathy,” said Tonks, feeling her heart going out to the girl, “In the magical world, Harry’s really famous...about as famous as you can get, and there’s so many people who judge him because of that, either admiring him or hating him, you know. And when he met you, well you didn’t know anything about that, you saw him for who he really was...”

Kitty didn’t say anything, and Tonks looked across to the girl, feeling sad, sad for the plight of Kitty and where it would lead her, sad because hers wasn’t the only impossible love.

“Wait till he wakes up,” said Tonks anxiously, “you really just need to talk about everything.”

“Will you send me away?” she asked in a helpless voice.

“I don’t know what’s going to happen Cathy, honestly,” said Tonks, the familiar feeling of panic in her stomach when she thought about what would happen when Harry did wake up.

There was a long silence and Tonks waited with baited breath, desperate to see what Kitty thought about her position.

“Have you told Remus you love him yet?”

Whatever she'd been expecting her to say, it wasn't that. Tonks was so surprised she could do nothing but stare at the floor, wide eyed and spluttering.

"What?" she laughed nervously, tucking her hair behind her ears.

"Have you told him yet?" she repeated slowly.

"Why would you say a thing like that?" said Tonks, looking around herself desperately to make sure no-one was listening.

"Well," she said slowly, turning to her and fixing her with a serious look, "I heard you yesterday talking, when he tried to make you dinner...and when your checking in on me and you think I'm asleep. You can tell in a second just by watching you."

"Well," said Tonks helplessly, knowing she couldn't squirm out of this one, "that's the last time I check in on you..."

She attempted a laugh, but it came out all wrong and Kitty looked at her with pitying eyes. Tonks was quite taken aback, not least of all because Kitty was being so different to usual, she wished everyone would let themselves see this side of her.

"Why don't you tell him," she suggested with an encouraging smile.

"It's a bit more complicated than that," struggled Tonks, "he's much older than me for a start."

"I used to know a girl at school who ran away to Gretna Green and got married at 15 to this 40 year old," said Kitty with a slight smile on her face.

"Really?" asked Tonks, quite amazed by this, "that's awful..."

"Not really, they're still together and they love each other...I don't really think age has got anything to do with love – do you?"

“No, I suppose not,” said Tonks in a faraway voice.

“So what’s stopping you?” she said in a tone that was so convincing, Tonks almost got off the bed and made to find Remus there and then.

“Myself,” said Tonks after a moment, with a slight laugh, what was stopping her?

She looked across to Kitty to see her staring at the closed notepad in front of her with a sad look in her eyes.

“Life’s too short,” she said quietly.

“I know that...But I just, I just don’t know what I’d do if he rejected me, you know?” said Tonks, wondering vaguely why she was telling Kitty all this, “I don’t think I could take it.”

Kitty thought about telling her she really didn’t have any problem in that department but then realised this would be tantamount to interfering and she’d learnt long ago that other people should stay well out of the trials and tribulations of love. Even if she was already slightly tweaking the circumstances.

“How do you know unless you try?” she told her instead, “and being rejected can’t possibly be any worse than having to see him every day and not having him.”

“I suppose so,” said Tonks in a faraway voice.

Kitty gave her an encouraging smile and Tonks laughed slightly.

“You know, you’re the first person I’ve told,” she said, scratching her nose to ward away embarrassment.

Kitty gave a pleased look.

“Why do you like him?” she asked, snuggling under her blanket.

She gave her a look of surprise before a girlish mood overcame her.



“Because...well because he’s kind, and funny, and he doesn’t realise what a good person he is,” she said, leaning on the side of Kitty’s bed, “and when I’m with him I feel like...”

“...like you’re the only two people in the world?” finished Kitty.

She looked over to her and nodded slowly. Kitty was smiling to herself sadly and Tonks looked at her as if she’d just seen the girl in a whole new light. It was like a window into her, that she was suddenly being more truthful and honest in that one second than she had been since they’d met.

“Is that how you feel about Harry?” probed Tonks curiously.

Kitty shrugged before looking over to her, suddenly nervous.

“That’s how I felt about the old Harry anyway...” she said, sounding like she was voicing a long held fear, “I just keep thinking...what if he’s not the same...”

“He’ll be the same,” Tonks assured her, “all this is just detail...you know Harry, don’t you?”

“I thought I did,” Kitty said in a faraway voice, still staring ahead vaguely, “but what if-”

“Tonks! There you are, I’ve been looking all over for-” came a voice and Remus appeared behind them suddenly, breaking off when he noticed Kitty, “Cathy, I didn’t see you there, how are you feeling?”

“Fine thanks,” she replied, secret smile on her face as she glanced at Tonks, who was red in the face now, “I was just gonna go and get some sleep actually.”

She jumped up, gathering the new magazines and her notepad and stashing the cigarettes in her pockets.

“Oh, well, sleep well,” Remus said as the girl jogged up the steps, throwing a wave back over her shoulder.

Tonks tried to hide her grin, feeling her stomach all aflutter again as she thought about Kitty’s words - what was the harm in trying?

“Is she ok?” he asked as he turned back to Tonks, worried look on his face.

“I think so, she had some nightmares and is getting more and more worried about Harry,” she sighed, climbing off the floor as well, “but at least she’s beginning to open up.”

“Yes...It might be useful if we tried to find out more about what happened that night at the graveyard,” he suggested, “although I suppose she won’t want to talk to us about it.”

“If she thought it’d help Harry I’m sure she would,” Tonks mused and they both lapsed into silence for a moment.

Tonks rubbed her face, she had been getting increasingly less and less sleep and felt like she was running on sheer determination at the moment. Remus must have noticed this because he suddenly fixed her with one of those piercing, studious looks that made her feel like her soul was being assessed.

“Are you alright Tonks?” he asked, confirming her suspicions, “you look...tired.”

“Nicely put,” she laughed, as they began to walk across the grounds, “lot of work on at the moment, as usual. I’m bunking off from the Ministry at the moment so I can’t actually stay that long. It was just a quick stop.”

“Oh right...I actually wanted to talk to you about that, I’ve been trying to come up with some ideas for your Gringotts situation which I was wondering if I could run past you,” he said hopefully.

She looked at her watch for a moment, feeling a little desperate, wishing for a time turner, "I really haven't got time," she said, disappointment evident in her voice, "sorry."

"Oh right," he said, face falling, "when will you be free next?"

"The year 2020?" she laughed, unable to stop staring into his eyes, "I'm free from 8 tonight? Don't have to go to Azkaban until tomorrow morning, if you're free?"

"Well, how about you come up to Grimauld Place and I can once again attempt to cook dinner?" he suggested, "third time lucky?"

"Sure, sounds like a date," she said without thinking, before cringing.

Remus however didn't notice or what ignoring her with gentlemen-like manners.

"I'll see you around 8 then?" he said, "I'll give you an hour's leeway because I know how you like to be fashionably late."

When Kitty awoke later that evening she did her usual stock check before moving - she was still in the Hospital Wing (she'd given up hope of the 'it was all a dream' scenario now) and Harry's friends were still sat around his bed chatting. She glared at them for a moment, sitting there thinking they were so brilliant. She gave a scoff and sat up, still feeling slightly groggy as she spent a few minutes untangling her dreadlocks, which always seemed to take a life of their own when she was asleep and decide to knot themselves up like snakes.

She looked over to her bedside table for a glass of water and noticed her CD player, upon which was a small scrap of weird, thick yellow paper. Frowning slightly, he picked it up and read the words 'Good as new' written on it in neat writing. Feeling slightly puzzled she tentatively put an earphone into her ear and pressed play, awaiting the horrible crackling that usually greeted her.

"If we could see tomorrow, what of your plans..."

She grinned happily, someone had fixed it for her!

Feeling like the evening had got off to a good start she quickly pulled the curtain and got changed back into her jeans and hoodie, pulling on her battered trainers and stuffing her hair under a woolly cap. She found that dressing in her own clothes, and not those weird robes that they kept giving her made her feel a lot more normal.

She grabbed the packet of cigarettes Tonks had given her, her sketchpad and CD player, putting in the earphones and cranking up the volume before she left her bay. She walked past Harry's bed, purposefully not looking in the direction of his friends, who she'd noticed out of the corner of her eye, were watching her cautiously.

When she got outside she thought it was safe enough to start singing along to the music quietly, choosing a patch of grass to sit on. She lay on her back, pulling out a cigarette and watching the clouds go past for a while as she thought about what she was going to do.

Remus had said it was dangerous, but she could take care of herself. She managed to escape from that graveyard from the guy that everyone in Harry's world seemed to be terrified of. What was one little forest?

Hundreds of miles away, in an unplotable house that could only be found by those who knew where it hid, the non-date between Tonks and Remus had come to an end.

"Well Remus, thanks for the lovely meal," said Tonks, pulling her travelling cloak around her shoulders.

"That's ok, thanks for the company," he said with a warm smile, getting up to show her to the fireplace, "maybe we should do it again, when you've got more of an appetite."

Tonks fingers slipped over the clasp, trembling with the butterflies that were gnawing at her stomach. She gave a laugh and she was horrified to find it betrayed her nerves.

“All you need to do now is get a decent night sleep,” he suggested, acting as if he hadn’t noticed her feelings, if he had at all.

“Yeah,” she breathed, cheeks flushing as she continued to struggle with her buttons.

“Having trouble with that?” he asked, not derisively but sounding slightly worried.

She dropped her arms and flexed her fingers for a few moments, feeling frustrated at both her cloak and her feelings, which were both getting on top of her.

“ Yeah,” she sighed, trying again, “My hands still freezes up sometimes and I’m just so tired I can’t think straight, you know?”

“ Here,” he offered, plucking her cloak out of her fingers and beginning to do the buttons, “I’m going to talk to Kingsley, get you some time off-”

“There’s no need for that,” she protested at once, trying to focus on the conversation, lest she let her close proximity to him completely melt her mind, “I’m fine...”

He looked her in the eyes for a moment, as if to suggest that he didn’t believe her for a second. It made her legs turn to jelly.

“Just a few days, you can get some rest, get some regular meals,” he suggested in a sincere, worried voice, “you’re no good to anyone like this.”

He had finished buttoning her cloak, but hadn’t stepped away and she fought hard to stop the fog invading her mind too much.

“I can’t...” she protested feebly, “I’ve made such good progress with Cathy – I really think she’s beginning to come around. And Harry should be awake any day now...once this is all over, things can get back to normal...”

“Or about as close to normal it gets around here?” he said, a smile on his face, her heart sped up even more.

“Yeah, I’ve never really realised how weird our world is until you start looking at it through someone like Kitty’s eyes, when you’re a small kid at Hogwarts it doesn’t really strike you how fantastical it all is...”

She had no idea what she was saying, she was just rambling along, saying the first thing that came into her head in an attempt to prolong the time she could spend around him, even though every second was torture to her. She closed her eyes wearily, and took a deep breath.

“Maybe a bit of time off would help you sort some things out,” he asked her, “like your next down payment.”

“I don’t see how missing work is gonna help me pay my dues Remus,” she said flatly as her head gave a throb.

She raised her hand to her temple, unaware she’d winced whilst Remus watched her silently. She was finding it difficult now to get even the simplest thoughts through her mind, finding herself unable to think of anything but how much she wanted him.

“Are you ok?” asked Remus, sounding worried suddenly.

“Yeah, of course,” she said, trying to brush away his worry, “just a bit of a headache...”

He leaned forward and placed the palm of his hand on her forehead, causing her to give a slight start. He looked slightly worried and she merely looked deep into his eyes, thinking over Kitty’s words to her as he moved his hand to her cheek.

“You’re burning up,” he said, looking into her eyes as well, taken aback slightly by the look in them.

“I know,” she said with a slight shrug, considering admitting her undying love for him right there and then, “but I’m not ill.”

“What’s wrong with you then?” he asked cautiously.

She was going to say it right then. The words were right on her lips, she even began to say them, but they died in her throat. She didn’t think she’d be able to stand the rejection, the look in his eyes, the pity. Right now all she wanted to do was to get out of the situation. Away from him and the closeness, the look in his eyes and the whole situation.

“I better get going,” she said, feeling like her heart was being crushed for no reason whatsoever.

“What?” he said, taken aback, obviously expecting her to answer his question.

“I need to go to sleep, sort myself out...” she said.

“Oh ok,” he said, looking strangely flustered all of a sudden, “well, thank you for coming...”

“Thanks for cooking and everything,” she said sincerely, “for being such a good friend.”

She couldn’t remember who instigated it, but she found herself hugging Remus, and for the moment, she just closed her eyes and relaxed. It was the first time she had for a few weeks, since at least before Harry went missing and she rested her cheek on his shoulder. It was a long time later when she realised he hadn’t seemed surprised by this, and hadn’t pulled away yet – this coming from a man who never really showed any sign of affection to anyone.

They swayed slightly as she tried to work out what this meant, head swimming and feeling as if it was stuffed full of cotton. She drew in a deep breath, giving a contented sigh as she tried to place the Remus’s smell – of burning wood or something, definitely not unpleasant.

She felt more rested now than after any of the power naps she'd been catching over the last few days and it was with great regret that she realised she had to pull away, she'd already given everything away by this point. She relaxed her arms and began to pull away, slightly confused to feel his own arms giving some resistance.

She made the mistake of looking into his eyes, feeling suddenly as if she couldn't breathe, that she held too much feeling inside herself to be able to cope, it physically hurt now to be around him so much. She couldn't even think now of an excuse for her quite obvious behaviour so merely spent what she thought would be her last few moments alone with Remus to study his eyes. They really were remarkable, on the surface grey, but deep inside a mixture of brown and even flecks of blue.

She could fall in love just with his eyes.

"Tonks..." Remus began in a low voice, causing her to give a start.

"Oh god, sorry," she exclaimed, face already burning brightly as she made to pull out of his grasp, "I'm-"

"No, wait," he said quickly and she froze, mid-squirm, the tiniest flicker of hope suddenly emerged within her.

"Yes?" she asked, still in his arms, still clinging on to the dream for a few seconds longer.

He went to say something but seemed to think better of it and the hope grew – could it be possible...maybe he did like her...

She was saved the trouble of ever having to worry about this when, quite unexpectedly, he leant down and kissed her. The shock of it was enough to paralyse her momentarily; sure she had dreamed, but she had never thought, never imagined...it couldn't possibly be true.

However, she was assured it was when after a few moments he didn't jump away in shock or shame and she found herself kissing him back, all traces of her weariness or headache gone. Tilting her



head to one side and placing a hand against his cheek softly, she felt as if she were dancing on the clouds, how could this be happening? The phrase kept running around her head over and over again, unaware that he was thinking exactly the same thing.

The bewilderment of it all suddenly hit her when she felt his arms drop around her waist and she couldn't help but grin into the kiss, desperate for oxygen but too overcome with long-felt emotion to stop. Instead she felt him lean closer towards her and the kisses become a bit more intense until they unconsciously both began to move backwards. She felt the backs of her legs bang into the sofas edge and she was unable to stop her falling down onto it, dragging Remus with her.

She gave a incredulous laugh at her clumsiness but felt it was no bad thing as she looked up to Remus, who was now straddling over her and leaning down to kiss her again.

“Tonks?”

They both froze instantly at the voice, before she was able to place it. By the look in his eyes, so could he.

“You’ve got to be kidding me!” she exclaimed loudly.

The voice of the Auror filtered into the room once again and with a leaden feeling in her stomach she raised her wrist to her lips.

“What?” she said a little savagely, not able to look into Remus’s eyes that were only a few centimetres above her own now.

“Could you get down here, there’s been some kind of disturbance at Fudge’s home,” came the disembodied voice.

She screwed up her eyes wondering whether she was able to say no when the sudden invasion of cold told her Remus had gone. She pulled her eyes open quickly to see him walking away slightly and she felt like her heart was breaking - he regretted it, she could tell instantly, just from looking at his slumped shoulders.

“Tonks?” queried the voice.

“What?” she asked, feeling very much like she wanted to cry.

“Are you coming or what?”

She stared over at Remus, tell me you want me to stay she pleaded silently, don't make this it. But he didn't say anything, merely stood with his back to her.

“Tonks?”

“I'm coming...” she said resolutely, her heart breaking as she tried to arrange her expression.

“Thanks. See you in a minute.”

Silence crept into the room and she dropped her arm onto the sofa, taking some time to compose herself. Finally she sat up, trying to tame her hair and gather her things as Remus turned around and watched her. She looked into his eyes but couldn't make out any one emotion, they just seemed empty and she wanted to scream and rant - why was her life so unfair?

“So you're going,” he stated, and again it was emotionless, empty.

“Yeah,” she said quickly, getting up and picking up her bag, “it's obviously for the best.”

“Right,” he said hollowly.

“Is this the point where I write my number on your hand and tell you to give me a call?” she muttered to herself humourlessly, heading towards the door.

“No, wait!” he said quickly, rushing over to her, “Tonks, this is all wrong...”

“What?” she asked as he trailed off.

“Listen...” he began hesitantly, before looking up into her eyes, “this is serious Tonks.”

She stared at him for a moment in hurt confusion.

“What does that mean?” she asked, hard edge to her voice now, the horrible feeling of impending rejection was momentarily directed towards anger.

“We need to think about this... if this is what we want...” he said and she looked away now, picking up her bag silently, “there’s things to think about...important things...”

“Fine, but I’m done with thinking.”

A look of hurt passed across his features.

“How long do you want?” she asked.

“Meet me tomorrow, if all this means something...”

“If all this means something?” she repeated dully, before giving a humourless laugh, “fine...where?”

“The Leakey Cauldron,” he said quickly, “at 1?”

She merely nodded, fighting with herself not to break down into tears there and then. However, the knowledge that somewhere, someone was waiting for her was enough to force her to turn away. She rushed onto the landing of Grimauld Place, almost on the stairs when she heard him call ‘good luck’.

Kitty was pissed off. Three hours later not only had she not seen one single supposedly dangerous magical creature, but she was also lost. Far from being scared, she was just annoyed, it was approaching dark now, she only had occasional flashes on the nearly full moon

through the trees to help her find her way and she couldn't find the path she'd walked in on.

She gave a snort of disgust, kicking out at one fallen log as she trudged on. She'd probably get into trouble when she got back too now, she was supposed to just make it a quick stop off. She scoffed again, like she cared if they were pissed off, it was their fault she was here, if they just given her a few more answers then she wouldn't be forced to do this.

She paused suddenly in her noisy trudging through the undergrowth as a high keening wail reached her ears. She looked around cautiously, it sounded as if something was hurt and she began to creep towards where the sound was coming from.

It sounded to her like a child in pain and she cautiously pushed aside a prickly branch that was hiding where the sound was coming from. The first thing she saw was the face of a young girl, perhaps no more than five or six, with a head of silvery hair, face scrunched up in pain. Then she saw the body, a silvery coat and four, hoofed legs.

She couldn't help it she gave a yelp of astonishment, which the girl heard and screamed right back as Kitty stumbled over. She gave a gasp as the horse-girl because to yell even louder and after a moment of merely stuttering she tried to speak.

"Don't scream! Sorry, I didn't meant to scare you!"

The girl paused for moment, eyes round with fear as Kitty sat up and tried to desperately hush her.

"Please! Don't scream!"

"W-what are you?" cried the girl, trying to retreat back, before crying even louder in pain.

Kitty looked down and saw her front leg was twisted around at an unnatural angle and was covered in deep red blood.

“What?” asked Kitty blankly.

“W-what are you?” she stuttered back.

“I’m a girl...a human,” Kitty replied uneasily.

The girl tossed her hair slightly, “I’ve never seen a human before...are you a witch?”

“No...I’m not,” Kitty said, edging forward slightly, “just a girl...are you hurt?”

The girl gave a nod, trying to brush away her tears stolidly, “My momma said I shouldn’t speak to humans.”

“Oh, why not?” asked Kitty.

“Because you’re bad...”

“Oh well...” she replied, looking around slightly desperately, “I’m not. What happened to your leg?”

“Fell over,” replied the girl, “it hurts and I can’t walk...I want my momma but she won’t come!”

“Do you want some help or something?” Kitty replied, completely amazed by this new creature.

Sure she had come into the forest to find them, but part of her didn’t actually expect them to really look like this...with proper bodies of horses, but with arms and hands and human heads...it was too bizarre. The girl didn’t seem to know how to answer because she just tried to back away slightly, looking around fearfully.

“I don’t want to hurt you,” assured Kitty, “but I think you need to stop your leg bleeding, or it’ll make you sick.”

“How can I stop it hurting?” asked the girl, still trying to sniff away her tears.

“I can put a bandage on it, wrap it up tight?” suggested Kitty, pulling her bag off her back and looking through its contents for something useful, “do you think that’ll work?”

“Maybe,” the girl pouted, watching Kitty carefully.

She found an old scarf in her bag and examined it for a second, wondering if it would do.

“I’ll wrap it up with this,” Kitty explained, “it might hurt a bit, but then we’ll take you to find your mom, how about that?”

The girl bit her lip anxiously, before nodding slowly.

“Ok here we go...”

Kitty reached out delicately and took the legs, wrapping the scarf around it tightly as the girl whimpered. She decided to keep talking, if only to keep her mind off the pain.

“What’s your name?”

“Branwen,” the girl whined, “but I don’t like it, I want to be called Branny.”

“Ok Branny,” said Kitty staring at the silvery fur in silent amazement, “my names Catherine, but I don’t like it either. I want to be called Kitty.”

“That’s a pretty name,” she replied, “it sounds funny.”

“I guess it does,” she laughed, “ok, done...”

The girl looked down at her leg and then tentatively tried to stand up, she gave another yelp as she put weight on it and Kitty reached forward to steady her.

“I tell you what Branny, if I hold you up this side you can lean on me and then you don’t have to stand on it,” she suggested, trying to position herself next to the tiny horse-like girl, “ok, good, let’s go find your mom.”

Kitty struggled with Branny through the tangled undergrowth of the forest, her being so much shorter than herself and whimpering at her injured leg. She could hardly believe what she was doing, if someone had told her a week ago that she’d be helping an injured centaur through a magical forest, she probably would’ve thought they’d smoked far too much.

But at least she was on the right path now, and Branny’s mother could read the future for her and she could get back to her bed, hopefully before they realised how long she’d been gone. She was just beginning to talk to the girl, trying to get more information about where they needed to go when she felt something hard hit her chest suddenly and she fell to the floor with a painful thump.

Branwen had yelled out and Kitty looked up to a full grown male centaur standing over her, spear pushed against her chest in an extremely threatening way. More of them crept into view until she realised she was surrounded by them and she suddenly didn’t feel so calm.

“What have you done to my daughter, human?” demanded the one standing over her in a deep, rumbling voice.

“I just bound up her leg, she was hurt,” stuttered Kitty, well aware that the spear against her heart had increased in pressure.

“Lies!” called a voice from behind her.

“It’s not! I found her hurt, I swear! Tell them Branny!”

"Its true daddy," came a small voice, "I fell over and you didn't come..."

There was a long silence and Kitty lay on the floor, not even daring to breath, trying not to imagine what would have if the centaur with the spear slipped...

"Why did you do that, what are you doing here witch?"

"She was hurt, I was just trying to help, sorry if that's a crime now," she said, feeling slightly riled now, "and watch who you're calling a witch!"

"I don't understand," growled the man, dark brown eyes narrowing towards her suspiciously.

"She's from the non-magic folk," came a voice behind her.

There was a sudden flurry of activity and Kitty watched as her surrounding centaurs suddenly backed down from their aggressive stance and herded into a small group in front of her. She raised her head suspiciously before scrambling to her feet and backing away from them. She turned to see an extremely large, old centaur in front of her, silvery mane trailing across his back, with a wrinkled, scarred face whose silvery eyes were studying her curiously.

"Is that not true?" he asked again, in a trembling, yet kind voice.

"Yeah," said Kitty, not liking having her back to the spear and bow wielding group, "I'm a...whatsthe word...muggle."

Chattering filled the air behind her and she hopped anxiously from foot to foot as the elderly centaur continued to peer at her short-sightedly.

"And lo, the one without a home will walk among the true," he mumbled to himself, before trotting forwards, "non-magic folk have not entered this realm for many centuries."



“Well...” began Kitty, edging backwards slightly, “I’m sorry to trespass...I’ll just get going then...”

There was the ting of metal spears gently being lowered into her path behind her and she froze, beginning to seriously shout at herself inside her head for deciding to come into the forest.

“We allow no one to enter our realm now,” he explained to her when she looked back to him, fear written across her face, “your kind are not welcome.”

“They’re not my kind,” Kitty replied before she could stop herself and instantly snapped her mouth shut again.

The old centaur gave a wheezing chuckle that didn’t seem to contain much actual humour.

“Not your kind,” he repeated, chuckling again, “no, you are right there. You are amongst permanent strangers.”

Permanent strangers, Kitty thought desperately. What did that mean? Had he looked into her future and seen there was no Harry in it? No magical world?

“You came seeking something?” he guessed and Kitty stared at him for a moment, “you came seeking answers.”

“Yes...” she whispered, stepping forwards now, “yes...I have some questions...I need your help.”

“We do not help the humans!” barked a voice behind her which Kitty ignored, staring pleadingly into the old, wrinkled face.

“She is not like those beyond the forest,” he replied steadily, reaching out and taking hold of Kitty’s chin, tilting her face back so her could see into her eyes properly, “she has shown us kindness.”

“But she’s not an innocent!” retorted another voice.

Kitty ignored them, staring at the silvery eyes which had no pupils as if she were entranced.

“No she is not,” he said quietly, before addressing her, “you have too much hurt and pain and hate in your heart to be innocent. You have done terrible things.”

“I’m sorry,” whispered Kitty in distress.

“You cannot repent for that which was forced upon you,” he said, so quietly only she could hear it, “but innocence is not something you can recapture - I’m sorry.”

“But,” she began desperately, “please, I just want you to help me.”

He tilted her chin slightly again and Kitty could feel the tears stinging her eyes now.

“I might not be innocent...I might have done horrible things...” she told him frantically, “and I might not be able to take it back, but I can feel sorry for it! All I want to know is if Harry will be ok? Will we be ok?”

“Ahhhh,” sighed the man, letting go of her chin and dropping his arms to his side. “I understand now. You seek answers from the one you love.”

“No, I want answers from you!” she replied.

“The answers you seek cannot come from me, look inside yourself and you will see that it can only be you that gives them.”

“Don’t give me that!” she said hotly, “I’ve just spent hours walking around this forest in the dark, scared of god knows what type of creatures to find you because I was told that you could read the stars and predict the future! All I want you to do is look up and tell me whether he is going to die here!”

The man stared at her for a moment, before giving a slight smile.

“You already know the answer to that question,” he replied.

“He’s going to be ok?” she demanded, relief flooding through her veins.

“Pluto is hidden from us tonight,” he stated.

She glared at him suspiciously.

“Does that mean yes?” she asked, “Because I don’t know about any of this magical stuff.”

“Pluto is hidden from us tonight,” he repeated.

She sighed in frustration, “Will he wake up soon?”

“Again, you already know the answer to that question.”

“Stop being cryptic!” she demanded angrily, “Will he wake up soon or not?”

“Again, you already-”

“I don’t know!” she cut in furiously, “How am I supposed to you? You’re the seers!”

“We are not here to dish out fortunes to whomsoever trespasses into our realm,” he said in a tight voice now, silver eyes glinting in the dim light.

“Obviously,” Kitty snapped back, “but do you know what? You’re not wise at all, you don’t even care! All I wanted was for someone to care, someone to tell me something! Anything! Make it up if you have to! Just make me feel better!”

“The answers you seek cannot come from me,” he merely repeated, sharp edge to his voice.

“Oh forget it!” she said, throwing up her arms, “Do you know what? You’re useless! Don’t you even care that he might die?”

“No, I do not.”

Kitty stopped and glared at him again.

“Well you should, because by all accounts he’s trying to stop something terrible happening to your precious magical world!”

“That is not our war.”

“Well, whether it is or it isn’t, you might find out one day that you won’t have a choice in that decision!” she scoffed, “Nobody wants to be part of war! Sometimes it’s just inevitable! I didn’t even know about this whole war thing and look where I am now!”

The centaurs were silent for a long moment and Kitty huffed, slinging her backpack over her shoulders, getting ready to go.

“You do not know of what you speak,” replied the old man finally, looking slightly shocked by her words.

“Yeah, well, that’s me, stupid muggle, stumbling around in the dark,” she said irritably, “at least I know what’s important! Which is more than I can say for you! But just so you know, when the time comes when you can’t hide in your forest from what’s happening, then I hope you’re on the right side. Because by all accounts, these guys are bastards and something tells me you won’t be on their list of friends!”

She stomped off towards the trees, fear evaporated in her anger now as she thought about her wasted trip and the futility of trying to get any sense out of a bunch of...of...horses.

“Catherine Earl.”

Kitty stopped at the voice, not even bothering to work out how they knew her name. She turned around and glared at the assembled group.

“What?”

“You’re knowledge and power will be called upon to restore two people soon,” the old man told her, “but your fate is still undecided. Be careful.”

She stared at them for a long time, feeling suddenly as if her world was being pulled away from under her feet. She became aware that the silence had lingered on and that she was trembling.

“Undecided?” she questioned in a querulous voice.

“Yes.”

“Undecided?” she repeated, “You’re trying to say that there’s a decision to be made?”

The centaur was silent.

“Is it Harry’s decision, or mine?”

“You’re fate is undecided Catherine Earl,” he said finally, “and that is all I can tell you, be careful.”

“You too,” she said, turning around as if in a daze and walking into the trees.

“Catherine Earl!” called the voice.

“What?” she asked vaguely.

“You will need a guide, the woods are dangerous, especially for non-magic folk.”

A large, white-coated centaur walked forward, bow in hand.

“Follow me.”

Kitty fell into step behind him, head a whirlwind of thoughts. She was going to heal two people? Who?

And what did undecided mean?

The walk back to Hogwarts must have taken about an hour, and in that whole time, the centaur that held his creaking bow poised at her, never spoke once. Kitty thought, in a vague sort of a way, he had a very strange idea of ‘guarding’, she felt like she was under arrest.

Far from answering her questions as she’d hoped, the centaurs had just made things worse. Now all she could think about was the word ‘undecided’ and whose decision it would be. She knew her decision, so it must be Harry’s it was hinging on - would he not want her anymore? Now she knew his secrets, now she was involved, now he had his friends back...she wouldn’t matter to him anymore, would she?

And what would happen to her then? She was alone, she had no one to turn to, she was probably a murder suspect...she been caught and put in prison, or worse, foster care...Kitty shuddered at the thought before the centaur behind her stopped walking suddenly. She paused without turning around.

“You are here now,” he rumbled, “be gone.”

“Gladly,” she muttered to herself, striding forwards and away from the centaur without thanks.

What did she have to thank them for anyway?

She reached the edge of the forest and stepped onto the grassy lawns of Hogwarts, staring ahead of her to the castle, lit up in the dark, with a deep sense of dread. She didn’t want to be here anymore, she couldn’t take it.

“Who’s out there?” came a deep voice suddenly, causing her to jump out of her skin.

She turned to see who it was that had caught her when her eyes fell on the biggest person Kitty had ever seen in her life.

“Je-sus Christ!” she yelped, stumbling backwards - the man was a giant!

“Is tha’ Cathy?” he asked, stepping forwards, “Harry’s girl?”

She stared at the man in shock, his face was mostly obscured by the huge frizz of black hair and massive beard, with shining black eyes poking out somewhere beneath his huge eyebrows. Everything about him was big...even his hands were the size of dustbin lids...

“Were yeh wanderin’ around the grounds at this time night?” he asked in astonishment, “surely not?”

Kitty nodded slowly, backing away as she tried to think of something to say.

“You’re a giant...” was what came out.

“Only half-giant mind,” he replied in a cheerful voice, “an your lookin cold.”

“Wh-” she asked, before realising she was indeed shivering, “Yeah, I guess...”

“Come on with me, I’ll soon have yeh warmed up,” he said, beckoning her to follow him.

Kitty stood stock still.

“Are yeh ok?” he asked anxiously.

“Half-giant?” she repeated incredulously.

“Yeh, come along,” he merely chuckled, “the Matrons been worried sick.”

Kitty sighed and decided she had no choice but to trudge after the half-giant. She didn't think she could take any more of these magical creatures, first centaurs, now this...what would be next, dragons and unicorns?

However, Kitty soon realised that instead of taking her to the castle, he was leading her towards a small stone-walled house sitting near the edge of the forest, surrounded by small vegetable patches. He held open the door for her and she sidled in, standing nervously by a massive chair as he shook off his coat, laid down the crossbow he'd been carrying, and fussed over a massive Doberman that had leapt up upon their arrival.

“Tha's only Fang,” he explained, when the dog bounded over to her, “he's daft as an old brush mostly.”

“Right...” Kitty said vaguely, stroking the dogs head before she couldn't contain the question any longer, “Sorry, but who the hell are you?”

The man gave her a blank look before chuckling, “Forget my manners, sorry! My names Hagrid, I'm games keeper here...friend of Harry's, he probably mentioned me.”

He said it so proudly and confidently that Kitty felt extremely guilty when she shook her head.

“ Oh well,” he sighed, looking slightly hurt, “I s'pose it's not important.”

“Well, if it makes you feel any better,” she said quickly, “he didn't tell me about anyone, even Ron and Hermione.”



“Oh,” he said, trying not to look pleased, before his face fell at a sudden thought, “tha doesn’t sound like Harry.”

Kitty felt the horrible lurch in her stomach whenever people mentioned Harry acting out of character, did that mean he wasn’t normal when he was with her?

“Here, sit down,” he said, motioning her over to the biggest sofa she’d ever seen, “fancy a drink? Cup of tea?”

Kitty grimaced, “Don’t you have anything stronger?”

Hagrid looked at her out of the corner of his eye, bushy beard twitching with a smile.

“Tell yeh what, it’s been a bit of a hard week, yeah?” he said, in the air of one convincing any third party that mind be eavesdropping, “Just a tippie, purely medicinal.”

Kitty couldn’t actually articulate how happy this made her feel - she’d spent years as having a quick drink the best way to calm down, wake up, work harder, relax more that the past week had been murder. Hagrid handed her a glass half full of amber liquid.

“Never seen someone look like they’re enjoyin something so much,” he remarked with a chuckle after she downed it, “mind, you’re a bit young to be drinkin.”

Kitty gave a laugh but didn’t reply.

“So, I’ll just tell Matron where yeh are,” he said, disappearing over to one of the dressers and Kitty sat back in her chair.

It was warm in here at least she thought, sneakily topping up her glass from the bottle of ‘firewhiskey’ he’d left on the table. When he walked back over he had an owl perched on his arm, holding a scrap of paper, which he released from the window, allowing it to fly away into the night.

When he sat back down Kitty was staring at him open mouthed.

“Owl post,” he explained, pouring himself a drink, “just tellin’ Matron yer ok and yeh’ll be up in a bit.”

“Thanks,” she said gratefully, falling silent and sipping her drink.

“So...are yeh enjoyin’ bein’ at Hogwarts?” he asked her brightly.

“No,” said Kitty flatly.

“Oh,” he said, shoulders drooping slightly, “I guess yer too worried about Harry.”

“Yeah,” she breathed, thinking about the centaurs and the word undecided.

“He’ll get better,” Hagrid assured her, “Harry’s tough as old boots. He’s a fighter.”

Kitty nodded dully, thinking about the horror of the graveyard - Harry was definitely a fighter, but sometimes it just wasn’t enough. Hagrid seemed to have run out of things to say and for a long time the cabin was just filled with the sound of the crackling fire.

“Feeling better after bein’ in the lake?” he asked hopefully after a while.

“Yeah...thanks, they told me you got me out.”

“No problem,” he said, looking at her anxiously, “what happened?”

Kitty studied the rim of her glass.

“Forgot I didn’t know how to swim.”

Hagrid chuckled slightly, but it died in the air. He watched Kitty worriedly for a few moments, before getting up and wandering over to

the dresser again. When he sat back down next to Kitty he showed her a battered cardboard box, which he placed reverentially on his knees.

“Maybe this would cheer you up?” he suggested, flipping open the lid.

Kitty peered in and saw a mass of photos, all of them moving. She couldn't help it, she jumped backwards with a slight yelp. No matter how much she tried, she didn't think she'd ever get used to see paintings move, but nobody told her photos did too.

“Sorry 'bout that,” said Hagrid sheepishly, “I forget...”

“No...no problem,” Kitty said, trying to ignore her madly beating heart.

Hagrid rooted around for a few moments, “I collect photos yeh see, like to have the memories.”

She nodded silently, thinking about the only photo she ever carried around, which was currently in her back pocket.

“Ah, here we are,” said Hagrid happily, pulling one out and handing it to her.

It was one of Harry, sat on the very sofa Kitty was sitting on, looking embarrassed to have a camera in his face. The moving photo was laughing at something and Kitty grinned slightly, she'd almost forgotten what it was like to see Harry smile or be happy.

“Tha was a few years back now,” Hagrid explained, “thought it'd cheer yeh up.”

“Yeah...it has,” she said, smiling now, “he looks so young.”

Hagrid gave a sad sounding laugh, “Yeah...I bet...and when he wakes up...we'll all have a good laugh about all this.”

“Do you really think so?” she asked vaguely, staring at the photo, “I don’t feel like we’ll ever laugh again.”

“Yeh will,” he said, “we all will...one day...”

Kitty nodded dully, this half-giant seemed almost as down as she was, and he didn’t really believe what he was saying.

“Don’ worry Cathy,” he said, “he’ll get better soon.”

Kitty nodded heavily, “I really hope so...I - I miss him.”

“Me too Cathy, me too...”

Tonks slowly prised her eyelids open, they felt like lead, like it took every ounce of her strength. She looked around her room with the dull eyes of one who isn’t entirely awake and wished to keep it that way. Last night’s raid had been messy and long, she’d only had about two hours sleep and her injured shoulder was killing her. She thought vaguely that she should have gone to St. Mungo’s, but then the rest of the night filled in and she remembered Remus, their kiss...the way he acted afterwards...

She knew now why he had acted like that....he was worried, about the age difference, about what people would think, that he wasn’t good enough for her...blah blah blah.

Well, she was going to meet him in Diagon Alley, and she was going to tell him that it wasn’t an issue, at all. Tonks slowly pushed herself up, propping on her elbows for a few moments as her head swam. She blinked rapidly for a few moments as her vision blurred, waiting for it to pass. Finally, when she felt awake enough and stable enough, she sat up and swung her legs out of the bed. She gave a dozy smile, thinking about the kiss again and reached for her wand, flicking the radio to life and letting the morning news wash over her, before an upbeat tune filled the room.

Now, what to wear, she thought to herself, feeling a flutter of excited nerves in her stomach, climbing to her feet. She created a mug of

coffee, clutching it to herself as she stood in front of her mirror and stared at herself.

She gaped in shock, surprised at how ill she looked, her skin was far too pale, her eyes ringed with dark bags and her stringy hair was hanging in limp on her face. How could Remus kiss that, she asked herself incredulously. She concentrated on having long, pink hair, staring at her reflection as the colour spread from the roots downwards. However, she had to stop suddenly as she unexpectedly felt off-balance. She reached out desperately and steadied herself on the mirror, clinging on for dear life as her vision blurred suddenly.

“What’s wrong?” she asked out loud, dazed and panicked voice echoing around the room oddly.

She screwed up her face, confusion taking over. There was too much happening, someone had turned up the volume of the music so her ears were throbbing from the sound, the lights seemed to be flickering again and she felt like she was standing in a lift that was quickly changing direction.

“Oh...” heard her voice saying from a long way away, “...help-”

The lift gave a violent jolt and she could feel herself falling, way down, for so long she doubted she’d ever hit the bottom and all the time the guitar was screaming in her ears and fireworks were exploding. When she did fall to the floor it was with a sudden crash and all around her, stars were raining down, stinging her skin where they fell.

And then it was black.

Remus checked his watch, drumming his fingers on the wooden table in front of him unconsciously. He knew what time it was already, and what this meant, but was still clinging on to the hope...

She’s not coming, said the rational part of his mind, you gave her the choice of either meeting you now, which meant last night wasn’t just a kiss, or not meeting you now, in which case it was just a kiss. He gave a sigh and looked at his watch again, he’d known she wouldn’t turn up, he was just trying to figure out how this made him feel.

Had he wanted her to turn up? Of course he had, but a part of him had been terrified of the prospect of what that would have meant. How did he feel about Tonks? Had he even wondered this yet? He'd become close to her over the summer, but what did that mean? He hadn't even been aware of the feeling that were creeping up on him, then suddenly bam. The past week had been unbearable.

He took a long swig of his drink, setting down on the table and checking his watch again. There was no point analysing everything really was there? She hadn't shown up, it was just a kiss. It was impossible anyway he reassured himself, an Auror and a werewolf... she couldn't possibly like him, it went against everything she believed in. He gave one final look over to the fireplace, before downing the rest of the drink and getting up.

As he walked out onto the street of muggle London, trying not to listen to the part of his mind that was raging against Tonks' stand-up and against the unfairness of it all.

"Forget it," he muttered to himself, deciding to drop into HQ before he visited Harry.

When Remus finally arrived in Hogwarts an hour later, his face was a blank slate, no emotion. He half expected to find Tonks there, ready to start the horrible charade of pretending nothing had happened, that he didn't feel anything, that he wasn't hurt...

But she wasn't there and Remus was almost glad, he didn't think he could cope with that yet. Instead he walked into Madam Pomfrey's office to find her standing over a cauldron, deep in conversation with Severus Snape. When Remus walked in, the man's eyes narrowed dangerously at him.

"Good afternoon," Remus said as Madame Pomfrey looked up at him.

"Good afternoon Mr Lupin," she said, looking slightly frazzled.

“No change then?” he guessed and she merely nodding, looking back down to her cauldron.

“We’re trying a new potion today,” she replied.

“What is it?” asked Remus, looking at Snape questioningly.

“A strong anti-toxin,” he replied tightly, “against any type of poison he might have taken.”

“I think we need to find out about the muggle medicine he had too,” the Matron said, brushing her hair out of her eyes and tucking it back under her cap, “just in case.”

Remus nodded, it was the same thing everyday, same suggestions, same potions, couldn’t they see that if anything, Harry’s seemed to be getting a little worse? He sighed wearily just thinking that he didn’t have the energy to deal with this, not after what had happened with Tonks last night and this morning when he caught Snape staring at him.

He had been so caught up in everything he hadn’t even thought about guarding his mind, and now Snape was grinning in an almost delighted way at him. Remus looked away, working hard on a mental block as Snape continued to smile to himself as he stirred the potion again. If he knew...he would make Remus’ life unbearable...

“How’s Cathy?” asked Remus hurriedly.

“Hmmf,” the Matron said, causing Snape to grin even more, “she disappeared yesterday for five hours. Didn’t come waltzing back in here until nearly midnight!”

“What? Where did she go?” asked Remus incredulously, forgetting about Snape for a moment.

“Merlin knows,” scoffed the Matron, “probably off smoking or causing trouble. I told her I’m not running a hotel!”

“Perhaps she was upset?” suggested Remus, slightly tersely, no wonder the girl hated the place when no one gave her any credit at all.

The Matron didn't say anything and Remus gave a sigh and walked out of the office, he'd just have to ask Kitty herself, see what was wrong. However, when he glanced over to her bed she was gone again and he gave a slight frown of worry before locating her sat at Harry's bedside.

He wandered over, sitting on the opposite side of the bed to her in silence, she glanced at him for a moment.

“You look like shit,” she said flatly.

“Polite as ever, I see Cathy,” he replied evenly, “what are you doing?”

“I heard somewhere that people in comas can still hear things,” she said vaguely, staring at Harry, “so I'm playing him some music.”

Remus looked at the headphone Kitty had placed over Harry's ears and the wire trailing down to the CD player.

“What kind of music?”

“You wouldn't know it,” she replied, “thanks for fixing my CD player by the way.”

“No problem,” he said, watching Harry for a few seconds, “do you think he can hear it?”

“Don't know,” she shrugged, “but it's worth a try right?”

Remus sensed that Kitty was feeling about as good as he was today.

“Where did you go last night Cathy?”

“Into the forest,” she replied.



“What?” he burst out incredulously.

She gave a half-smile, “Went to talk to the centaurs, didn’t really go that well.”

“Are you being serious?” he demanded, “That was incredibly dangerous!”

“Yeah, I know,” she sighed, slumping back in her chair.

“Why did you do that?” he asked in disbelief.

“Well, you and Tonks said they could predict the future...I wanted to ask if they knew what’d happen to Harry,” she explained, studying her fingernails in disinterest.

“But...How...” he spluttered, trying to fathom her logic, “Well...what happened?”

“They spouted a load of cryptic shit that I didn’t understand, so I got pissed off and left,” she said, features darkening, “completely useless.”

“Cathy...” began Remus, seemingly unable to think of anything to say, “the forest is an incredibly dangerous place to be in, especially if you’re not protected, please don’t go in there again.”

“I know it is, don’t worry, I won’t be going in there again,” she replied, “there’s no point.”

“If you knew it was so dangerous, why did you go in there?” he asked.

“Because I just wanted some fucking answers!” she burst out, suddenly angry, “Everyone here is acting as if I’m just in their way and won’t even tell me what’s going on! I mean, what’s really wrong

with Harry? Why won't you tell me? Why won't you just say something, anything to make me feel better!"

Remus sighed heavily, "I'm sorry Cathy, you're right, we should be doing more to help you. But right now we don't know what's wrong with Harry. He's perfectly healed as far as we can see. But he's deeply unconscious, and the more things we try, the worse he seems to get."

"Well, what can we do then?" she asked anxiously.

"I don't know," he said heavily, "I've been doing as much research as I can, but nothing seems to fit...Perhaps, if we knew more about what happened at the graveyard, it would help?"

Kitty stared at her knees for some time in silence.

"I know that you don't want to think about it," he said carefully, "but-"

"But if it'll help Harry right?" she finished, "Yeah I suppose...but I wasn't with him most of the night."

"You weren't?"

"They kept us separate, I remember feeling as if...as if I were sleepwalking...I was awake and I could hear everything...but I couldn't move..."

"That's a common spell they use," explained Remus quietly, "adds to the fear..."

"Yeah, I guess..." she said in a faraway voice, "I could hear them talking about Harry...about how this was a big moment for them...something they've been waiting for...for a long time. I didn't understand."

"Voldemort has been after Harry since he was born," Remus said, "when he was a baby, he came to where his parents were hiding, to

get rid of them all, but when he tried to kill Harry, it didn't work, it nearly destroyed Voldemort altogether...but not Harry..."

"But Harry's parents..." she asked, not daring to breathe.

"Dead. James went first, then Lily. That was the night we all thought Voldemort had been killed, and there were parties up and down the country, everyone was so happy...But not us," Remus took a deep, shaky breath, "They were dead, Sirius was being tracked down for their murder, Harry was being sent away...And people were celebrating."

"They'd nearly made it," Kitty said, sounding upset, "that was the last day..."

"If it hadn't been for them, it wouldn't have ended. As it turns out, it wasn't the last day," said Remus, "just a break...and now its happening all over again. And Harry's back in the middle of it again."

"But...I don't understand," Kitty said in frustration, "why Harry? Is he some kind of superwizard or something?"

"No," said Remus impassively, "we just all want him to be."

"Well...I think you should get somebody else to do it," she said tersely, shuffling forwards and picking up Harry's hand.

"It can't be like that Cathy, you must understand-" he began.

"No, I don't have to understand!" she cut in, shooting him a glare, "if this was Tonks lying here, and you knew someone was trying to kill her, you wouldn't accept it! You wouldn't let her be in danger!"

Remus said nothing, sitting back in his seat as they stared at each other for a long moment.

"Would you?" demanded Kitty angrily.

“No I wouldn’t,” he said finally, in an even tone.

“No you wouldn’t! Harry can’t do this anymore,” she cried, gesturing to him, “he doesn’t want to!”

“He hasn’t got a choice anymore, Cathy,” he told her slowly.

“There’s always a choice!” she said loudly.

Remus watched her sadly, surprised to hear the strain of tears in her voice

“We’re sixteen years old Remus,” she said in an urgent, frightened voice, “sixteen. This isn’t what’s supposed to happen! We were happy...we were going to go to Cornwall, go surfing, sleep in a tent and eat barbecue every night! We weren’t going to care about the past because we had each other...and that was enough!”

“I know Cathy, and I’m sure that’s what Harry wants, more than anything,” said Remus anxiously, leaning towards her and fixing her with an understanding look, “but Voldemort isn’t going to let that happen. Not until this all ends.”

“So I’ve just got to sit by and let this all happen?” she demanded, tears sliding down her face now unchecked, “wait for someone to come by and tell me it didn’t work, Harry’s dead, just like that?”

Remus got up and rounded the bed, crouching down in front of Kitty, who was viciously wiping away her tears, leaving dark streaks of make-up across her cheeks.

“Everything’s going to be alright Cathy,” he told her gently, “it will, I promise.”

“How can you say that?” she asked, voice tight with tears now, “How can anything be right after this?”

“Cathy, horrible, terrible things happen to people every day,” he began, “and sometimes you look at it all, or your life, and you just think...I don’t want this anymore, I can’t handle it...But you can’t give up, you never do...because it’s always better to fight. Never give up.”

“But I can’t fight if I don’t have Harry,” she sobbed, still uselessly swiping at her tears, “I don’t want to be alone anymore...”

Her face crumpled into tears and Remus knew that there was nothing he could say to her now that would change the way she felt. Instead he pulled her into an inexperienced hug, which she fell into, sobbing onto his shoulder. He was almost surprised, Kitty’s hard, unapproachable appearance didn’t seem to resemble this girl at all.

He didn’t say anything as she cried, tears gradually subsiding as he thought about what she’d said. About not being able to fight without him, about not wanting to be alone anymore. He didn’t want to be alone anymore, he didn’t want it to end like this with Tonks. He would have to go and speak to her...now wasn’t the time for caution and rational, logical thought. Now was the time for seizing what you had, before it was too late.

He became aware that Kitty had stopped crying and he sat back, studying her cautiously.

“How do you feel?” he asked quietly.

“Like shit,” she muttered, smearing her make-up in a little more, “I’m just tired now...of everything.”

“This has been a hard week for you,” Remus said, “but it’s going to get better.”

“How?” she asked faintly, “How can it? I don’t think I can take this anymore...I can’t-”

She was interrupted by the sound of the curtain surrounding the bed being pulled slightly aside as Hermione, Ron and Ginny walked in. They stopped dead when they saw Remus, crouched on the floor in

front of Kitty, who was now busily trying to hide her face from the three.

“Can you wait outside you three?” he asked loudly.

Without a word they nodded and backed away, when he turned back to Kitty she was already gathering her things together.

“You don’t have to leave,” he told her.

“Forget it,” she muttered, pulling the earphones away from Harry, “this is pointless.”

“If you need someone to talk to,” he suggested, standing up as well.

“Yeah, thanks,” she said quickly, again wiping her face, “bye.”

“Get some rest Cathy,” he suggested as she walked back to her bed.

She merely threw a wave over her shoulder and Remus merely stared after her for a moment. He didn’t know how to deal with this at all, they needed to seriously consider what was going to happen to the girl next.

“Sir?” came a timid voice.

He turned to see the Ron, Hermione and Ginny standing slightly nervously beside the bed.

“Come in,” he said merely, conjuring a few extra chairs for around the bed.

They sidled in and looked to one another for a moment.

“Is she alright?” asked Hermione after a moment, looking past him to Kitty’s bed.

“Not right at the moment,” he replied honestly, so at least they knew not to say anything to her today.

“Oh...” said the girl, looking to Ron for a moment, “should we...”

“I think its best if we give her some space at the moment,” Remus cut in, knowing the last thing Kitty would want right now would be the strain of talking to Harry’s friends.

“Oh...ok...” she said, nodding quickly.

“I have some important business to attend to,” he said quickly, pulling his cloak back on, “but could you do me a favour? Cathy seems to think it might help talking to Harry...”

“We already have been,” said Hermione quickly.

“Good.”

Remus gave one last look at Harry, unnerved by his deathly white skin and gaunt appearance.

“Goodbye Ron, Hermione, Ginny,” he nodded, stepping out.

“Goodbye sir,” they chorused.

He gave Kitty a small wave before striding about the hospital wing. He would go and see Tonks right at that instant. He would tell her that he didn’t want to be alone anymore. He would tell her he wanted her and didn’t care about anything else.

“Did you see her face?”

Ron and Ginny looked at Hermione for a moment, before all craning around the edge of the curtain to see Kitty, sat up in bed, rubbing her face quickly.

“She looked really upset,” agreed Ron awkwardly.

There was an uncomfortable silence, they all felt horribly guilty for the way they'd treated the girl, and even worse about the way they felt about her. They avoid each others eyes for a moment, none of them wanting to voice their feelings.

"So...Harry," began Hermione in a brittle voice after a moment, "we don't really have much news...I nearly beat Ron at chess last night, that's how worried he's been..."

One hour later Remus was striding into St. Mungo's hospital, making straight for the lifts, he needed the Second Floor apparently. The lift seemed to take an impossible amount of time to reach its destination and Remus jiggled from foot to foot, anxiously trying to think what could have happened to Tonks, if she would be alright and if he could get as far away from possible from the oozing man standing next to him, gibbering like a turkey.

When the doors opened he all but threw himself out of the door, looking around for a mediwitch. He located a stocky looking woman standing at a large board, upon which were various symbols, which obviously made sense to her as she was taking notes off them curiously.

"Could you tell me where Nymphadora Tonks is being kept?" he said at once before even introducing himself.

"And who are you?" asked the woman without even looking at him.

"I'm her," he began, searching for the right word and settling on, "friend."

The woman turned a sharp eye towards him and looked him up and down, "And does her friend have a name?"

"Remus Lupin," he said at once, "please, can you tell me if she's ok?"

"She's with the senior mediwizard at the moment," said the woman, purposefully avoiding his question.



Remus felt his heart thumping against his chest.

“What’s wrong with her?” he demanded, “Why is she here?”

“That is what we’re trying to find out,” said the woman, causing Remus to glare at her angrily.

“Well give me a clue!” he all but shouted, “has she been savaged by a hippogriff or fallen down some stairs?”

“There’s no need to shout Mr Lupin,” said the woman coolly, “I am not aware of what is wrong with Miss Tonks-”

“Remus!” came a voice suddenly, stopping the woman mid-rant.

They both turned to see Mrs Weasley striding down the hall, looking pale faced. Remus at once set off towards her, abandoning his fruitless argument with the mediwitch.

“What’s happened Molly?” he asked at once, taking hold of the woman’s arm and steering her back the way she came.

“I don’t know Remus,” she said anxiously, “I found out by complete accident, heard two of the Sentinels talking about her in Diagon Alley – apparently one of them brought her in...they won’t let me see her or speak to anyone.”

“Was it a prisoner?” he asked in a pained voice, he knew he should have stopped her from going to that place, what would Sirius have thought if he’d known she was going there?

“I don’t know,” said Molly, shaking her head and leading him over to the door, upon which the name N. Tonks was now written.

Remus tried to open the door but it was locked and the door handle glowed red when he tried to twist it. Black bold words began to appear ingrained into the woodwork.

## Do Not Enter – Examination in Progress

Remus sighed in frustration and turned to Molly. She was twisting her hands in front of her and her freckles were standing out on her ash white face as if someone had gone crazy with a felt-tip pen.

“How did you find out? I’ve only just owled Alastor,” she asked anxiously.

“I was at the Auror department,” he said, feeling slightly as if he was going to be sick, “Kingsley told me.”

Mrs Weasley nodded for a few moments, still wringing her hands.

“Oh Remus, what do you think could have happened?” she asked tearfully.

He shook his head, feeling suddenly like he couldn’t speak. He sat down in one of the many wooden chairs that were arranged along the corridor and place his head in his arms. How could he have been so stupid? Tonks hadn’t turned up today, he should have known then that something was wrong. If even she didn’t want anything more to happen between them he should have known she’d have the decency to turn up and tell him that. Why would he think her capable on standing anyone up? All that time he’d sat there staring at his watch and she had been somewhere, in pain...

“Are you ok Remus?” asked Molly suddenly, from somewhere next to him.

He took his face out of his hands and looked across to her, giving a weak nod and trying to appear more collected, more Remus-like.

“You look awfully pale,” she said, then caught herself as if embarrassed.

It took him a few seconds to realise what she was referring to.

“Full moon’s not till Friday Molly,” he said in a strained voice, before looking down the corridor to save on awkwardness.

“Of course, sorry, I-” she began, before giving up, “When do you think they’ll finish?”

“Soon I hope,” he said, I pray, he corrected himself.

Silence descended and Molly walked off to contact her family and the Order, returning what seemed like hours later but what was actually only about ten minutes by the impossibly slow clock in the hallway. While Molly fidgeted in her seat, jumping every time she heard footsteps or a door opening, Remus sat straight-backed, staring at the wall in front of him with unseeing eyes.

He felt a horrible sick feeling in his stomach, and the fear of the unknown was driving him insane.

If she was dying he just wanted them to tell him.

The door beside them suddenly opened and out walked a mediwizard, white cloak billowing about him as he rushed out, clipboard in hand and wand twirling between his fingers.

“Is she ok?” he demanded at once, appearing next to him instantly.

He jumped slightly and looked at Remus, then Molly before ushering them backwards slightly. Before he could say anything, a hospital bed appeared in the door and Remus stared at it emerging to see Tonks lying on it.

He almost gave an exclamation of horror, she couldn’t have looked less like Tonks if she’d tried. She seemed so small in the bed, her skin so pale it was the same colour as the bed sheets, covered in hundreds of tiny cuts and one long gash down one side of her face. It was livid a blood was still oozing out of the corner, the red standing out so vividly from her skin it looked unreal. She was out cold and her eyes were ringed with deep purple shadows. Remus rushed forward, only to be blocked by the mediwizard.

“Tonks!” he shouted desperately, already knowing she couldn’t answer.

The bed was being wheeled away and Remus could do nothing but stare at her disappearing form, while Molly next to him created a fuss; demanding in a loud voice to be told what was happening to her. Then she was gone and they were being led into a quiet, side-room by the mediwizard.

“What’s wrong with her?” he demanded as soon as the door was closed.

“We are not entirely sure at this moment in time,” he said slowly, pulling his notes towards him, “she was brought in about an hour ago by a work colleague – apparently he’d found her passed out at her home. He was alerted when she didn’t turn up for work this morning.”

“I don’t understand,” said Molly in a weak, wobbling voice, “she was at home? How d-did she get like that?”

“As far as I can tell, her body seems to have been under considerable stress lately,” he said, consulting his notes for a few moments then looking back up at them, “I understand how shocking it must be for you to see her like this, but if I could just ask you some questions?”

They both nodded mutely and Remus stared at the floor unseeing.

“How had her health been lately?” he asked.

“She’s been under a lot of pressure,” said Molly when Remus didn’t answer, “she’s got three jobs...she’s been ill for a while...I thought it was just flu...”

She broke of tearfully as it dawned on Remus that Tonks hadn’t been very well for what seemed like weeks, how could he not have done anything about it...

“I see, did she complain of anything in particular?” asked the man nodding to himself.

“Well...sickness and headaches really, she’s always tired...” said Molly and Remus felt the slow horror of realisation creeping over him, they’d known for weeks, “I thought she was just overworked! She’s not long been out of hospital after the Ministry Duel...”

“Ah, that would explain the arm then,” said the man almost to himself, “we thought it looked too old to be related to this episode.”

“I don’t understand,” said Remus suddenly, “what exactly is wrong with her? She hasn’t been attacked?”

“Not that we can see, this seems to be some kind of degenerative illness,” he said calmly.

“But the cuts...” he asked in confusion.

“Well from what her work colleague told her, she must have pulled a mirror over onto her, she was surrounded by shattered glass in any case,” he said as Molly made a noise of distress, “perhaps she was trying to steady herself when she collapsed?”

“When you say degenerative illness,” said Molly, looking upset yet puzzled, “what do you mean?”

“Well, Nymphadora seems to have lost a lot of weight in a short space of time, from what we can tell she hasn’t really been eating, and if as you say she’s had several jobs at once, this would certainly account for her lack of sleep, energy in general in fact.”

“Why hasn’t she been eating?” asked Molly, looking to Remus for help.

“I don’t know,” said Remus, a closed expression on his face.

Suddenly it all became clear to him, if you counted up the amount of hours she worked then it left nothing but a handful of hours to sleep, eat, rest, and she'd been spending them at Hogwarts, watching over Harry and Kitty. She worked herself into the ground, and what thanks did she get off everyone? Nothing...

"So what's going to happen next?" asked Molly quietly.

"We're taking Nymphadora up to the ward, we're going to run some tests, stop as many of the symptoms as we can and give her some restorative potions," he said slowly and clearly, as if he wanted them to understand exactly what was happening.

"And she'll be better?"

"Once she's regained her strength, got a few square meals inside her, and had some much needed rest," said the mediwizard nodding encouragingly, "she should be up and about in about a week."

Remus sighed with relief, he had almost convinced himself that Tonks was critically ill, that he'd lose her before he'd even got her, and now he was being given a second chance.

"You can go down and see her in a few hours when she comes around," said the mediwizard, climbing to his feet and showing them the door, "we're going to let her wake up naturally."

"Thank you," said Molly sincerely, shaking the man's hand.

"No problem," he said smiling slightly, "she's down on Rudolfensis Ward, you'd be best to come back in a few hours."

Remus sat on one of the many chairs spaced out along the corridor outside Tonks' ward, deep in thought. Various people had been coming and going since news got out, her friends, various Order members, parts of the Weasley clan had come but as of yet everyone had left him alone. He didn't think he could really communicate with anyone if he tried.

There was an atmosphere of shock, confusion, a feeling of uselessness that was almost palpable. Tonks' best friend was sitting on the seat a few paces away from Remus, she had been staring at the wall for almost half an hour now and hadn't spoken to anyone yet. And he knew exactly what everyone was thinking...they were thinking about how guilty they felt, for not realising, for not helping, not doing anything.

Remus opened his eyes to see a mediwitch checking Tonks' pulse, pulling up her eyelids to look into her eyes and arranging blankets around her, she was still out cold

"Remus?" came a soft voice to his side.

"Yes?" he said, turning to look at Molly blankly, as if surprised that she was still there.

"I'm going back now, the Orders called a meeting and I need to set up," said Molly, anxiety etched over every syllable of her sentence, "are you going to stay here?"

"Yes," he said with a firm nod of his head, "I better, in case..."

"Ok, I'll take everyone with me," she said and then left.

There background babble of noise slowly died away and he became aware of other noises now, the murmur of voices within Tonks' room, the sound of footsteps as people ran up and down corridors, the occasional scream or shout or comical sound effect.

Tonks prised open her eyes, feeling dazed and confused, as she took in her surroundings. Everything was slightly blurry, but she got the overwhelming impression of white, of noise, hustle and bustle. Why were there so many people in her house? She scrunched her eyes up and must have fallen asleep again because when seconds later she opened her eyes again, the light level had changed, it was darker and quieter.

She tried to shift where she was lying, suddenly remembering she had to get up to meet Remus, that she was probably late already, but found that she couldn't move properly. Her limbs felt heavy, her bones seemed to weigh a ton and her whole body was throbbing to the pounding in her head.

"Turn radio off," she mumbled to herself – the noise in this place, though dimmer than before, was making her headache worse.

"Tonks?" came a voice from by the side of her and she frowned as she tried to figure out who it could be.

"Get out," she tried to tell them, feeling her thoughts and mouth moving sluggishly out of time, "s'my house..."

"Tonks, it's me, Remus," said the voice and she tried to pinpoint where it was coming from, her left hand side.

"I'm late?" she mumbled, trying to reach her hand up to her hair which she worried was a mess, "Sorry...was asleep..."

"Tonks, you're in St. Mungo's," he said and she was confused to hear worry in his voice – why wasn't he annoyed that she stood him up?

"I'm late for work," she said suddenly, desperately trying to sit up.

A hand was pushing her shoulder back down and she looked across to find her eyes focusing on Remus' face. It was pale and tired looking, with bags under his eyes.

"Just rest for a while Tonks," he said in a strained voice, "you're ill...get some sleep."

She searched his eyes for some kind of clue as to what was happening but found her body agreeing with him wholeheartedly, sleep sounded nice...



“Wake me up in a few hours,” she managed to mumble, eyes drooping dangerously, “see Cathy...”

And darkness overtook her again.

Remus arrived at St Mungo's the next day just in time for the beginning of opening hours, bypassing the mediwitch he had argued with yesterday and going straight to her ward. Just before he walked through the doors to the ward, he took a peek in the window, using it as a mirror to check his appearance, before looking over to where Tonks was. She was sitting up in bed, a mask-like apparatus strapped across her mouth and nose, staring ahead dozily. He almost gave a laugh of relief, she looked a million times better from yesterday already, she was still pale, still had black bags under her eyes and strangely multicoloured pink and brown hair, but all the cuts had gone.

He straightened up his robe, ran a hand through his hair and went into the ward. He passed the beds of other patients, who had all looked up eagerly at the newcomer to see if it was a visitor for them, all but Tonks that is, who was still staring vaguely ahead of herself. He walked over to her bed, suddenly self-conscious of the flowers.

“Good morning,” he said after clearing his throat.

She slowly dragged her eyes from whatever she had been staring at and looked up to him, eyes heavy and an air of sleepiness about her. She reached up and pulled her mask down so that it fell round her neck and gave him a weak smile.

“Hi,” she said faintly, rubbing her eyes before dropping her arm to the bed heavily.

He looked at her worriedly, trying to figure out what the mask was for, he'd never seen one before and was worried she developed something overnight he wasn't aware of.

“They'll all be...wearing these in London this...season,” she joked in a weak voice which sounded slightly out of breath.

“What is it?” he asked, slightly nervously.

“Not quite sure,” she said with a heavy shrug, “something about...replenishment...mist, something or other...apparently I’ve caught...a bug....”

This seemed to wear her out and she seemed to sink further into her pillows.

“A bug?” he asked anxiously.

She merely nodded, seemingly exhausted now.

“What kind of bug?” he said, sitting down on the chair next to her bed and fixing her with a worried look.

“A b...bug-type bug.”

She closed her eyes for a few seconds before looking across to him, something of an embarrassed look in her eyes.

“How are you feeling?” he asked her worriedly, still grasping onto the flowers rather tightly.

“Like I’ve been...hit by...the knightbus,” she managed, before giving a slight laugh and a weak smile, “I bet you think...I’m really...stupid?”

“Of course not, why would you say that?” he asked, sliding into the chair by her bed and fixing her with an anxious look.

“For all this...fuss?”

He gave a relieved laugh and shook his head with a smile and she smiled too, obviously feeling happy he didn’t think bad of her.

“Of course not, I told you to take it easy didn’t I?” he told her, “I didn’t think you’d stoop to being hospitalised to get out of work though.”

She smiled widely, not able to laugh for lack of energy but look like she sincerely wanted to, “Believe me...I’d rather be at...work.”

She gave a cough and attempted to pull her mask back up and he leant forward quickly.

“Here, let me do that,” he said quietly.

He brushed her hair off her face gently and placed the mask back over her nose as she watched him with heavy lidded eyes. He was suddenly aware of what had been wrong with him since he’d arrived; he was nervous! He had butterflies in his stomach that had been cunningly hidden by the anxiety of whether she was ok or not.

When he sat back down again she looked across to him, eyes drooping slightly, “How’s Harry?”

“The same,” he said heavily, “I don’t know what’s wrong with him...Madam Pomfrey seems at a loss.”

“And...Cathy?”

“Not too good,” he admitted with a sigh, “I think it’s starting to get to her now...I don’t think she can cope with it all anymore.”

“What can we do?” she asked in a pained voice, wincing as she shifted slightly.

“We need Harry awake,” he said flatly, “nothing else is going to work now.”

“At least she...can talk to us now...right?” she asked hopefully, “That’s got to be...better than before? We’ve got to do...something-”

Tonks made to sit up and Remus gently topped her, pushing her back onto the pillows.

“Stop worrying about other people for a minute,” he said seriously, “and tell me how long you’ve been ill.”

“But Cathy-”

“How long?” he pressed.

She gave a frown and shifted slowly in her seat so she could see him better

“I can’t...remember,” she said finally, settling into her pillows wearily, “I got used to it...it wasn’t out of the, ordinary, in the end...”

“How long?” he pressed, unwilling to let her get away with that answer.

“A few weeks?” she suggested, looking embarrassed again, “too much work...and not enough play...makes Tonks a dull girl...”

“A sick girl,” he corrected, for some reason feeling slightly annoyed at her for not taking more care of herself and putting him through all this worry.

“Sucker for...attention, me,” she tried to joke, a fact which was ruined by her sudden bout of coughing, which sounded dry and painful.

“Why didn’t you tell me?” he asked her quietly, staring at the bed clothes in front of him.

She sighed and turned her head away from him for a moment.

“Tonks?” he prompted, when the silence continued.

“I couldn’t,” she said awkwardly.

“Why not?” he pressed, “Why couldn’t you tell me?”

“Because...” she began, turning back to him and fixing him with a dull eyed look, “that would’ve meant...it was real.”

He nodded heavily, he understood completely.

“And I was scared...of stopping...” she admitted, looking away, “in case...I thought that’s all that was keeping...me together...”

“Tonks,” he said heavily, feeling a shiver of fear chase down his spine again, “it wouldn’t have got that bad, if you’d told me you know.”

She gave a half-hearted shrug, “I didn’t know...if I could tell you....”

He was silent for some time, trying to figure out what that meant before she gave a slight laugh, dropping a heavy hand onto his arm which was perched on the side of her bed.

“You...angry with me?” she asked, looking worried.

“No, of course not,” he told her with a warm smile, “just worried for you.”

“No need...am fine now...” she said, despite all evidence pointing against it.

She realised how she sounded when Remus pulled a face and she gave a sigh, before settling into a smile and studying his face. He felt her mood had changed and he hoped that it wasn’t something he’d said.

“I’m sorry...Remus,” she said suddenly, closing her eyes wearily for a few seconds.

“What for?” he asked her incredulously, quite aware her hand was still on his arm.

“Because I...didn’t turn up,” she said timidly, cheeks flushing slightly, “I was going to...meet you.”

He had never seen Tonks be anything less than upfront, unembarrassed and open. To see her looking so bashful and embarrassed was such a new experience to him he didn’t say anything for a few moments, which she took as a bad sign.

“You weren’t going...to turn up?” she said hollowly, “oh...”

“No,” he laughed, leaning forwards earnestly, “I was there, I waited...”

“Oh,” was all she could say, before looking over to him and giving a slight smile, “really?”

“Really,” he nodded, then feeling a sudden weight off his chest, as if he’d been unconsciously worried about this for so long he’d forgotten.

“That’s the second...good thing that’s happened, to me, today,” she said finally, grinning widely now.

“What was the first?” he asked, smiling happily as well.

“You coming.”

They both gave an awkward sort of a laugh and Tonks gave him a lopsided grin.

“That was a bit cheesy...sorry.”

“No problem,” he laughed.

She grinned, before coughing suddenly and taking a deep, lungful of air before removing the mask and looking over to him again.

“The other night...I thought you...regretted it...” she said, carefully measuring his reaction.

"I thought you did to," he replied awkwardly, "I thought you wouldn't have left, if you didn't."

"Oh..." she said, nodding a heavy head, "crossed wires..."

"But, let's forget about that, I'm no good at this sort of thing," he laughed, "out of practice."

Tonks grinned slightly, "It's a deal...I just think...there isn't time for this...anymore."

"You're right," he replied, picking up her hand self-consciously, "life's too short."

"You sound like Cathy..." wheezed Tonks.

Remus grinned before a sudden thought occurred to him.

"Did she speak to you," he began, "about me, I mean."

She looked at him for a second, before giving a laugh.

"You too?" she realised, "That girl..."

AN/ OK...I'm so sorry for the hugely long, most annoying delay - here's my excuse! I'm doing my final year of university and have a 10,000 word dissertation to write on early human evolution and skull morphology and am finding it hard to find time to write! I get a few paragraphs done a day, so it's slow progress! I can't promise when the next one will be out as I get closer to the deadline, but I'm trying my hardest!

Hope you're all still enjoying it, despite Harry doing his impression of a zombie and T/R plotline. I still enjoy writing magic from muggle eyes and seeing Kitty unravelling without Harry.

But next chapter... grins ...all shall be revealed...let's just say the centaur wasn't just speaking 'a load of cryptic nonsense' as Kitty put it.

THANKS!



## Chapter Twenty Four

But my dreams,  
They aren't as empty,  
As my conscience seems to be.

“Good morning,” said Remus in a bright voice as he walked into the ward that morning, “and how is the patient?”

“Lots better,” she said, grinning widely and trying to present an appearance of not being as shattered as she felt.

“You still look very pale,” he said, frowning slightly as he arrived at the side of her bed, “what have they said?”

“Rest, blah blah blah, recuperation, blah blah blah, must drink this, that and the other,” she said vaguely, waving her hands about, “I heard tell that chocolate was involved somewhere, they seem remarkably reticent with it though...”

She gave him a conspiratorial wink and he smiled back, obviously realising she was vastly improved since the day before.

“Well it just so happens...” began Remus, putting a brown bag on the bed next to her, “that I got you a few things.”

Tonks eagerly looked into the bag, there was a large slab of Honeydukes best dark chocolate, a big bottle of Xaviers multi-berry drink, a small book and a rolled up piece of paper. She looked up to him feeling inexplicably touched by the assortment of items he brought her.

“It was dark chocolate that was your favourite right?” he asked, sounding almost worried, before grinning with relief when she nodded, “and the drinks better than the stuff they have here.”

“What's the book?” she asked with interest as she pulled it out.

“Catch 22...Well you said a while ago you started reading it and lost it in the move, so I went down to the muggle library by me and they had it...” he trailed off at her shocked expression before adding hesitantly, “it was Catch 22 right?”

“Yes...well...yes it was,” she managed to say, “I just, I can’t believe you remembered...or went to so much trouble...I...Thank you.”

“It’s no problem,” he said, looking slightly bashful, “can’t have you sitting in here getting bored can we?”

She suddenly felt the urge to scream out with happiness. Not only were things going spectacularly well on the mutual feelings side of things, she’d managed to find a guy who was possibly the sweetest on earth and could actually remember more than two facts about her.

“The last thing a present someone else asked me to give you,” he said, changing the subject quickly to avoid getting self-conscious.

“Really?” she asked curiously as she reached into the back, “Who?”

He merely motioned her to find out for herself. She looked down at the roll of paper which she instantly recognised as being muggle, she gave a nonplussed look, before unravelling it slowly. When she flattened it out and took a good look at it she couldn’t help but feel her mouth drop open slightly in shock. It was a picture, drawn with a muggle pencil depicting what she eventually realised was the hospital wing at Hogwarts.

The drawing was amazing for several reasons, not least of which was the completely unique art-style in which it was drawn. There didn’t seem to be any outlines and everything was made up of swirling shapes and curves which to her looked like what magic would look like if it had colour and texture, emanating from things other than wands. The picture was of the view from where one of the bays were, looking down the aisles of the beds, which were all huge four poster mahogany ones of the sort found in posh hotels, with rich hangings. Walking down the aisle was what Tonks immediately decided was Madam Pomfrey, although it looked nothing like her and was hardly

discernable from the background. This was due to the fact there were actually no boundaries to any of the items featured, the curves and swirls just merely took a different direction.

However, the thing that caught the eye the most was what was happening in one corner of the picture. It was here when the most detail was found and had obviously been the most time consuming piece to draw. It was what Tonks again immediately decided was Harry's bed although there was no real reason that it should be so, next to which two people were standing. It was the most bizarre, unreal and yet totally beautiful piece of artwork she'd ever seen in her life and her eyes filled with inexplicable tears as she studied the two figures, whose hands were clasped and arms entwined with each others so it looked like a single spiral.

"Cathy drew this?" she asked in a whisper eventually when she regained her composure.

"Yes, she gave it to me this morning, Madam Pomfrey said she'd been drawing all day yesterday," he said, looking rather proud momentarily, "what is it of?"

Wordlessly she handed it to him, watching his expression change from the initial shock to wonderment and awe. She finally guessed he'd caught sight of her and him in the picture, because he gave a faint smile and looked across to her.

"Its beautiful," he stated, "she's got a real talent."

"Yes, she does..." agreed Tonks thoughtfully, brain already working overtime.

"She's written something on the back for you," he noticed and she flipped it over quickly.

Wotcher Tonks,

Hope you like it, thought you might miss this place is you didn't visit it at least once a day! I hated hearing you was ill and feel really guilty, I

know it's my fault because you've been worried about Harry and everything and me leading him astray and being a bitch to everyone.

Sorry. I'll try and do better from now on.

Also am sorry if you and R in the picture was a bit obvious, I think I got a bit carried away. But something tells me you wouldn't mind ;) He was in a right state the other day about you.

Anyway ,maybe you can draw me a picture of where you are and we'll compare shades of white used for walls, ceilings, beds, etc...The list of uses for that colour is endless here.

Hoping you get better, everyone's dead boring here and I want to strangle Hermione - nothings changed eh? Miss you loads! Come back soon and rescue me!

K

-xx-

She read it back out loud for Remus's sake, who gave a smile at Kitty's usual flamboyant way of communicating.

"Looks like you got through to her," he told her, looking proud.

"Yeah, I think you're right..." she replied in amazement still staring at the picture.

She gave another grin, she'd just found Harry.

"She also gave me these," he said, pulling a sheath of paper out of his bag.

"More pictures?" she said with a grin, "Who else has she been drawing then?"

"These are a bit different," he said, tone serious now.

She frowned at him slightly before looking down at them. They were sketches, the most unbelievably detailed drawings of peoples faces, hoods pulled up over them. Underneath every one was a name, jotted down, with various different attempts at the spelling.

“What are these?” she gasped although she already knew the answer.

“The Death Eaters from the graveyard,” he said heavily, sitting down on the side on her bed, “she told me she’d been drawing them since she got to Hogwarts, in case we needed them.”

He gave an incredulous laugh.

“But...but there are names here...and faces...this is proof,” she whispered in awe as she riffled through them, there were seven altogether.

“I know,” he said, watching Tonks closely, “she wouldn’t tell me what happened that night, I don’t think she ever will...but I think this was the only way she knew how to help. She asked me if we could find the people that did this to Harry, if it would help him get better.”

“Perhaps,” she said, still staring at the pictures in amazement, “there’s so many of them...how could she remember their faces, she must have been terrified...”

“She has nightmares,” he said flatly, “the Matron told me she wakes up most nights. The brains a wonderful thing.”

The last part came out as a sigh and Tonks felt a horrible lurch in the pit of her stomach.

“The things she’s seen Remus...” she said in a hollow voice, “You’ve seen what they do to their prisoners...it’s a wonder she’s even here at all.”

“I know,” he sighed, “but she’s a fighter.”

“Harry’s all that’s keeping her going,” Tonks replied, staring down at one of the faces, who was sneering horribly, “and I don’t know how much longer she’s going to last without him.”

“We’re going to figure this out Tonks,” Remus told her firmly, “I’m taking these to the Ministry now, we’re going to drag every single one of these people in, and we’re going to find out what they’ve done to Harry. And then...then they can rot in Azkaban.”

Tonks looked up at him, taking in the steely look in his eyes and the set of his jaw and nodded firmly to him.

“Go get them,” she said simply, handing him the drawings.

He nodded, standing up and pulling his travelling cloak on.

“I’ll come back this evening,” he promised her.

“Don’t worry about me,” she said with a crooked smile, “the Aurors are going to want to speak to Cathy, she’ll need someone there, especially if they take evidence.”

He gave a nod, knowing it was for the best but nonetheless wanting to come back and see her.

“Ok,” he said with a reassuring nod, “tomorrow morning then.”

He leant down and gave her a quick kiss on the lips, before turning quickly and walking out. Tonks smiled dreamily for a moment, before it faded slowly as she wondered how Cathy would cope with Auror questioning and yet more waiting for Harry.

Hermione and Ron were walking up the stairs into Hogwarts, it had become their daily routine and the familiarity of it was becoming worrying.

“Every day we do this,” Ron pointed out, stamping his muddy boots on the stairs, “I feel like we’re stuck with a Time Turner.”

“I’m sure he’ll be better today,” said Hermione distantly.

“Oh yeah, right, just like yesterday when you said that? And they day before?” he pointed out scowling, “Why aren’t they doing anything?”

Hermione was silent and Ron cast her a look.

“It’s your turn to say something comforting and optimistic,” he said flatly.

“I can’t think of anything right now,” she replied dully as they pushed the front door open.

“How about, ‘I read something last night that really made sense and I think I’m going to ask Madam Pomfrey?’” he suggested.

“Ron, you know I didn’t find anything out last night, because you were sat right next to me,” she said heavily, “and we both didn’t find anything, again.”

They were walking down a corridor now and Ron gave a heavy sigh, Hermione wasn’t in a bad mood per se, she was just in a defeated mood, which in a way was worse. He had the horrible feeling she’d given up.

“I just wished it felt like they could do something, you know?” he said.

“Yeah, well, maybe if that girl told us a bit more of what happened to Harry we wouldn’t be in this position,” she scoffed, and Ron noted that she’d started calling Harry’s girlfriend that girl, “I don’t see why she had to be so secretive.”

“Maybe...” began Ron vaguely, before giving up, “I don’t know...”

Hermione gave a huff and she approached the hospital wing, pushing the door open tentatively. They both looked at Harry bed instantly, hearts sinking horribly as they saw him lying in exactly the same position as yesterday.

“Same old, same old,” muttered Ron and they walked towards Harry dejectedly.

They sat themselves down and shared a look that said it all.

Same yesterday, same today, same tomorrow. No change.

“I tell you what mate,” said Ron, slouching down in his seat, “you’re really milking it this time.”

Hermione was still perched on the edge of her seat, staring at Harry as if the answer would suddenly appear to her.

“He looks worse,” she said suddenly and Ron looked up.

“Huh?”

“He’s worse,” she said, standing up now and leaning over Harry, regarding him critically, “look! Yesterday, he wasn’t this yellow, I’ve noticed it getting more obvious over the last few days, don’t you think?”

“I always thought he looked yellow,” Ron said, also standing up and peering at his friend.

“No, it’s worse now,” she said emphatically, “and he’s beginning to look gaunt, look at how hollow his cheeks are. They should at least be able to keep him stable.”

Ron sighed heavily, dropping back into his seat, “I don’t know, seems like we can’t do anything but sit here and wait for something, anything to happen.”

Hermione sat back down slowly too, “I know what you mean, I feel like I’m constantly on alert...like I’m always expecting to hear-”

“-bad news?” finished Ron, before nodding, “I know...this just feels different to anything we’ve seen before...”



“Well he’s never-” began Hermione, before trailing off.

Ron looked up, her gaze was fixed on something over his shoulder and he twisted around to see what it was. He found Kitty, sat on her bed, staring over at them. He was taken aback for a moment at how ill she looked, her dreadlocks were hanging down limply around her face and her pale skin had a horrible translucent quality to it, a little of Harry’s jaundiced in it. She was watching them out of deeply ringed, black eyes but Ron got the feeling that she didn’t even realise, she seemed to be looking straight through them.

He felt slightly unnerved by her gaze, turning back to Hermione, who was also watching the girl with a faintly puzzled look on her own face.

“What’s she looking at?” Ron whispered at her.

Hermione looked at him for a moment, before she flicked her eyes down to Harry.

“Oh,” he said, looking back to the girl.

She seemed to be shaking.

“I think she-” began Hermione, again interrupted when the Hospital Wing doors opened again.

They were surprised to see Remus walk into, closely followed by a man and a woman in dark blue robes. They looked extremely official and authoritarian and Remus had a worried expression plastered over his face.

“Aurors?” Ron whispered again to Hermione in puzzlement, “What are they doing here?”

Instead of walking over to Harry as they expected however, they continued past his bed and was heading towards Kitty. She’d noticed

them as well because she was now standing at the side of her bed, watching them with distrust written in every line of her expression.

“What’s going on?” Ron asked Hermione quietly.

“What’s going on?” they heard Kitty ask Remus loudly.

Remus however had reached her now and his reply was so quiet that they couldn’t hear it. Whatever it was, Kitty was shaking her head, backing away slightly.

“I don’t want to,” Kitty said, staring at Remus hard, “you said I wouldn’t have to, not yet!”

“Are they taking her away?” asked Ron incredulously.

Hermione shook her head, obviously she knew what was going on, even if he didn’t.

Whatever Remus’ quiet reply had been, it seemed to have worked because Kitty was suddenly being led out of the Hospital Wing by the Aurors, head bowed, Remus closely following her.

“Professor?” asked Hermione inquiringly when he was by their bed.

He looked across, as did Kitty, expression unreadable.

“Don’t worry Hermione,” he said cryptically, “we’re just having a little chat.”

And then they were gone.

“Little chat?” asked Ron incredulously, “with Aurors?”

“They’re interviewing her,” said Hermione breathlessly, “finally! Ron, we might actually get some answers now!”

“I’m sorry about that,” Remus was saying half an hour later as he walked across the lawns, “she’s still traumatised by what’s happened.”

“Of course, of course,” mused the Auror, “but you realise that we will have to come back and try again?”

“Yes, of course,” he nodded, “gives us...a few days for me to talk to her?”

“Ok,” said the man, “but we need that evidence, as soon as possible, the Wizmagot won’t take drawings alone as evidence, we need her to testify too.”

“ I understand,” Remus nodded, wondering if the man truly understood how difficult it would be for Kitty, what her introduction into the magical world had done to her.

“ We’ll be back soon,” he said, before walking towards the apparation boundary.

Remus waved them goodbye, before quickly walking to Kitty’s favourite spot, sitting on the ledge of the stairs. He approached her cautiously, just in case, to see her staring impassively at the floor, hollow look in her eyes.

“Sorry,” she said shortly, giving a slight sniff.

“Don’t even think about it Cathy,” he replied, “I didn’t expect them to come straight away, I wanted to talk to you beforehand properly.”

“It’s ok,” she mumbled, and he leant on the ledge next to her carefully and she rubbed the tears off her cheeks.

He tried to think of something to say, but seemed to have run out of comforting words, he thought that perhaps Kitty was beyond comforting now.

“Sorry,” she said in a shaky voice.

“For what?” he asked in surprise.

“For...that,” she replied heavily, “I want to help, I do, but...I just...”

“Don’t worry Cathy, I understand,” he said reassuringly, patting her on the arm self-consciously.

She made a noncommittal noise at the back of her throat.

“Just so you know,” she blurted out suddenly, as if she’d been holding this in for some time, “I don’t know what’s wrong with Harry.”

“I know that,” said Remus blankly, “why would you say that?”

“Because...because I was there,” she replied with some difficulty.

“Cathy, we know that if you knew anything about what happened to Harry, you’d tell us,” he told her seriously.

She nodded her head quickly.

“Why would you say something like that?” he wondered out loud, studying her face carefully.

“I heard his friends talking,” she mumbled, focussing on a piece of thread she was tugging off her jeans, “they reckon I’m holding back, although there’s no reason why I should for Christ sakes.”

Remus sighed deeply, he was going to have to speak to Ron and Hermione again, they obviously hadn’t understood his first warning.

“Don’t listen to them Cathy,” he said flatly, “they’re just stressed and upset and guilty.”

She was silent for a moment, before looking up at Remus, puzzled frown on her face.

“Guilty?”

“Their best friend disappears for three weeks without a word,” he suggested, wondering if Cathy had even thought about this, “they don’t know if its because of something they’ve done, or something they didn’t do. Maybe they feel as if they should have known something was wrong, done something about it.”

“They should have known something was wrong,” Kitty pointed out, “they knew something was wrong! Sirius had just died, Harry was wracked with guilt and grief - how could they not know?”

Remus stared at her in surprise, taken aback for a moment.

“I...don’t know,” he finally replied, thinking about this for a moment, “I guess we’re so used to seeing Harry cope with things.”

“Well he shouldn’t have to,” she snapped, “this shouldn’t be happening to him! He’s a good person, all he wants is to protect what he’s got! He can’t cope when he loses it!”

Again, Remus was taken aback.

“Is that what you think Harry’s doing?”

“Of course,” she said moodily, “but how can he keep on going if people are always trying to take that away from him?”

“I don’t know,” Remus replied heavily, thinking about this, “I don’t know.”

He and Kitty lapsed into silence.

“I will do it, I’ll give evidence, tell them what I saw,” she said finally, fiercely, “I will. But...but I need...”

“Time,” nodded Remus, understandingly.

“No...” she shook her head, “no...not that...”

“What is it?” he asked gently, “What can we get you?”

“Harry,” she whispered, “I need Harry.”

Kitty awoke from her nightmare with a start, flailing madly as the sheets of the hospital bed tangled around her feet and legs just as the cold hands had in her dream. She gave a choked cry, trying to breathe deeply as her chest heaved air back into it. She closed her eyes shakily, but had to open them almost instantly, faced as she was by the evil glint of red eyes, the image of Harry crumpling around the knife blade as it plunged into his stomach.

Shaking terribly she all but threw herself out of the bed, hastily shuffling across the hospital wing until she reached Harry’s bed. She took up his cold limp hand in her shaking one, squeezing it tightly as if to reassure herself he was still there. She sat on the side of the bed and forced herself to calm her breathing down, to forcibly stop shaking, stop thinking about the images, just concentrate on being normal...

She stared at Harry in the moonlight, feeling the panic overtake her once again, how could she try and be normal when he was lying here, slowly slipping away from her, wrapped in magic and surrounded by these people who were trying to either break them up or kill them.

“They won’t break us up,” she whispered to him, amazed at how shaky her own voice sounded.

She tried to stop the tears forming in her eyes as she stared at his blank, sallow face, she wanted nothing more in the world than to hear him agree with her right there and then.

“They won’t,” she repeated, brushing her fingertips down his freezing cold cheek, “Harry?”

Why was she even trying anymore, she knew he wouldn’t reply, and it just made her even more upset when he didn’t.

“Harry, please wake up...” she choked out, “I need you...I can’t do this anymore...”

She took one look at his face and let go of his hand, turning away, she couldn't even bare to look at him like this anymore, it made her feel sick.

Suddenly she felt the need to get out, she couldn't stand his silent presence, the white walls of the hospital wing, the carefully blank painting frames, the smell...the expectation.

She grabbed her overcoat and threw it around her shoulders and marched out of the room.

She emerged into the cold night air, teeth almost instantly chattering as she looked across the dark grounds of the castle. The stars were twinkling brightly and the moon was shining down, an almost perfect replica of it formed on the black water of the lake's surface. She tried to let the peaceful atmosphere wash over her but she couldn't shake the ominous feeling she had in her bones.

Kitty crawled onto her favourite seat, high above the lawns and leant her back against the castle, surveying the entire area. She was lit a cigarette and tried to smoke through her shaking hands. The whole day had just been horrible from the nightmare that had woken her up, the day spent thinking about the interviews...more nightmares at night...she couldn't rest...couldn't stop.

It was always there.

She flicked her ash down onto the floor when her eyes caught sight of something - a red velvet slipper. Frowning in confusion, she slid off her seat and looked at it for a few moments curiously, before picking it up.

Apart from the embroidered shield of a lion, bird, snake and badger, it looked perfectly normal and she frowned, that ominous feeling in her bones increasing even more. Suddenly an image from her childhood flashed into her mind, a glass slipper on the steps of the palace and she looked up at the castle in confusion.

A sudden piercing bird cry echoed across the grounds and she spun around, heart hammering madly. She desperately wished she had some kind of torch, for the first time in a long time she felt scared of what the shadows might hide, what lingered in the dark. She was edging down the stairs when she caught sight of a hunched figure on the grounds and she instantly halted.

It was swathed in a heavy robe, carrying a bundle and shuffling forwards. Her heart seemed to have froze, before bursting into a life again as she watched them continue away from the castle, staring at the floor. The birds screeching caw echoed around the grounds again and Kitty jumped out her skin, now noticing the bird on the ground just in front of the figure. She could hardly breathe now and seemed frozen to the spot with terror - was it one of Them again?

The hunched figures shuffling, stumbling procession continued as it followed the awfully screeching bird. She finally managed a good look at it and saw that it was a magpie.

“One for sorrow,” she whispered automatically, one of life’s deep believers in superstitions, “Good morning Mr. Magpie, how is your wife?”

It hopped up and down angrily and she looked around quickly, hoping to see another one to cancel out the bad luck before she noticed something else lying on the ground just behind him. It was another slipper.

Slowly she looked down at the one in her hands - somehow she couldn’t imagine the people that were responsible for Harry’s injuries wearing velvet embroidered slippers and she looked back at figure. Now she came to think about it, they looked old, hunched over and walking so slowly and purposefully that it seemed almost as if they were ill.

Hesitantly she crept closer to the figure, bird screeches setting her teeth on edge. Finally she was only a few metres away and, feeling suddenly very foolish for not having a weapon, she spoke up.



“You dropped your slipper,” she said querulously.

Then cursed herself - what kind of a threatening statement was that?

The figure didn't even seem to notice her but the bird gave an almighty screech, as if it were intensely angered by her appearance.

“Shoo,” Kitty snapped at it before edging closer, “are you ok?”

The bird hopped up and down, screeching even louder as Kitty swallowed her fear and laid a hand on the figures arm.

“Should you be outside?”

The figure stopped and looked at her vaguely. It was just an old man she realised, letting the breath she'd been holding rattle out. He was wearing what look like a red velvet dressing gown to match his abandoned slippers that was tied loosely with a gold sash around the waist. In his shaking, wrinkled hands he held the biggest book Kitty had ever seen. She looked up at him worriedly and his frightened, but kindly looking face stared back.

He was muttering constantly under his breath in a scared sounding voice and Kitty couldn't help but instantly trust him, he seemed lost and cold - a little crazy, but not the madman she thought he was.

“You're freezing cold,” noted Kitty, taking one of his hands and rubbing it slightly, “let's get you inside pops.”

He nodded, mumbling continually and allowing himself to be taken by the arm and turned back towards the castle. Almost as soon as this happened the bird that had been hopping around her feet gave another screech and leapt up, wings clipping her face causing her to jump back in surprise.

“... Pretty bird...” she managed to make out in the old mans ramblings and she frowned deeply.

There was something intensely not right going on here - there was no way even the most enthusiastic of bird lovers would ever say that the bird in front of her was pretty, its song alone, if that's what you'd call it, was grating on her nerves, setting her teeth on edge.

"No, horrible bird," Kitty told him firmly, taking his arm again, "leave it here, come on..."

Even though she was expecting a retaliation, she hadn't been expecting the flash of claws that raked down the side of her face suddenly, causing her to leap back with a cry, which caused the old man to give a fearful jump too, rambling increasing in panic and persistence.

"Get lost," shouted Kitty angrily, picking up a stone and chucking it at the bird, which dodged out of the way.

The ominous feeling inside her increased and she got the feeling the magpie was a lot smarter than usual. She tried to ignore the whisper in her head that told her it was magical and hefted another stone at it, it may be magical but stones were stones and they hurt.

It merely hopped out of the way and seemed to be scaring the old man now.

"Come on, pops," she said, in as strong a voice as she could manage through her uneasiness, "lets go back to the castle."

She took his arm and began to lead him back along the grounds, kicking out and batting away the bird which was fluttering around her head madly, putting her in mind of the psycho birds from the old horror movies. When they finally got back to the castle steps the bird finally shied away, seemingly unwilling to cross over the threshold. For peace of mind however she slammed the huge front doors shut and took hold of the man's hand who was still muttering and clasping the book to his chest.

"Are you ok pops?" she asked kindly, looking into his face properly in the light.

He was definitely old, waves of tangled silver hair fell about his head and his long beard was also matted about him. He was gazing at one of her feet, before switching to the next and she watched his dull blue eyes worriedly, trying to make sense of his nonsense words.

“Let’s get you to the hospital, yeah?” she asked, taking hold of him and turning him in the right direction.

However, for such a frail looking man he possessed some strength because moments later he had turned her around and was motioning forward, muttering incoherently.

“You want to go this way then?” she asked him curiously, “ok, just for a wander, then we’ll get you to the doctor, ok pops?”

So Kitty let the old man take her around twisting corridors, past parts of the castle she hadn’t had chance to explore yet and just when she was worrying he’d tire and was planning to turn back, he halted in front of two large statues.

“Where are we now?” she asked him.

He merely loosened her arm and handed her the heavy book, which made her knees bend slightly under the weight. He approached the statue and lay a hand on top of the gargoyles head between the pointed ears.

“Jelly baby,” he whispered, among others things, and suddenly a doorway was in front of her, with what looked like an escalator inside it.

He made a move onto it when Kitty took hold of his arm, “You’ll fall over on your own,” she cautioned him, “wait for me.”

And with that they were off, Kitty held onto the cold hand, trying to balance the huge book on her knee and she peered at the floor - as it turned out it wasn’t an escalator, it was a spiral staircase, made of stone, and it was moving.

She merely gave a sigh and looked across the man, mild grin on her face.

“This place is crazy,” she told him and his darting, vague eyes brightened for a moment, twinkling in the gloom.

She gave a laugh and with a jolt found herself at the top of the stairs in front of a large oak door. Tentatively she pushed it open, gasping slightly as it revealed a huge oval room, lined with bookcases and wood panelling, strange devices lying on small tables looking dusty and unused. The whole place had the feel of a room left abandoned for years and she brushed away some cobwebs that were hanging in front of her, taking in the dusty fireplace, empty picture frames crammed onto one wall, birds perch looking decrepit and unused.

“Where’s this?” she asked the old man, who was systematically touching everything within reach once with a wrinkled finger.

She wasn’t perturbed by his lack of answer and walked over to the massive desk that dominated the room, on it lay sheaves of ancient looking paper, crumbling away or gathering dust, strange symbols jotted all over them.

“You best come out of here,” cautioned Kitty, walking back over to him, “it’s all dusty and dirty, you might catch something.”

He took the arm she offered but once again steered her away from the direction she wanted to go, shuffling over to the bookcase. He pulled open the glass door and stood, mumbling and muttering under his breath as he surveyed the books - Kitty got the feeling he was seeing something she wasn’t as he became to touch a few of them in a seemingly random order.

Plantes of the Blacke Foreste, Charms of the Chinoreals, Dinner Party Etiquette and the Bumper Book of Bagpipes before finally pulling out Hogwarts: A Quidditch History.

With a rumble and grinding sound, the bookcase Kitty had been staring at began to roll backwards and with astonished eyes she looked around it into a large, similarly dilapidated bedroom.

“Is this you’re bedroom pops?” she asked curiously, shuffling in slightly and checking it out, “Is that it, you want to go to bed?”

The old man placed the book he’d taken from the shelf on top of the other one she was carrying and shuffled into the bedroom. Kitty scurried in after him as he sat down on the massive four poster bed, sending up a cloud of dust that caused the moth eaten drapes to flutter slightly.

“It’s too dirty for you to sleep here,” she told him as he looked around, mumbling still and taking in his surrounding with a slightly fearful look.

With a sigh Kitty placed the two books on the large desk and walked over to the man, kneeling down in front of him. He was still shaking and Kitty took the old blanket that was lying across the bottom of his bed and shook it slightly, causing a rain of dust. She began to cough and the man began to chuckle, trying to catch the dust that floated past his head.

Kitty began to laugh and shook it again, watching the man spend a delighted few minutes playing with the dust before she laid it over his knees. Stepping back she studied him critically as he looked back at her, waiting patiently to see what she’d do next.

“I’m Kitty,” she said slowly, motioning to herself, “who are you?”

The man motioned to himself as she had, babbling away, she managed to catch the word ‘Kitty’.

“No. Me Kitty,” she said pointing at herself, then pointing at him, “you...?”

He looked at her blankly, before saying, “Feet.”

“I’m sure you’re not called feet,” she sighed, looking at his toes poking out from under the blanket, “Oh, I see. Are you cold?”

“Feet... Jelly Baby...cold...” he nodded, watching a dust mote float past, “Kitty...cold...”

She grinned widely, that was better, there was some sense in there somewhere she was sure. Looking around she relocated where she’d dropped the slippers and went to put them on him but he turned his nose away and his ramblings became more panicked.

“Ok, not you’re fancy slippers?” she asked, looking around, “socks then, how about a nice big pair of socks?”

His eyes lit up instantly, twinkling bright blue for a moment that caused her to laugh appreciatively, “We like socks right?”

“Socks...Kitty...” he agreed and she got up and wandered around the room, nose tickling at the dust as she found the chest of drawers.

However, a quick examination found all the clothes too threadbare or dusty to use and she gave a troubled sigh, what was a sick old man doing living in a rat hole like this? Surely he can’t have been here all this time? When she wandered back over to the man he was watching her with large, round eyes.

“Socks...” he asked her, voice almost containing hope.

“ Not here...” she said, then seeing his face crumple with disappointment added hastily, “but! But, how about these, nice and warm at least...”

She pulled off her shoes to proudly display her stripy orange and black toe-socks, complete with smiley face on each individual toe and googly eyes.

The man began to roar with laughter, acting as if he’d never seen anything as funny as her socks in his life and she spent a few, happy minutes wiggling her toes at him as he prodded and poked them,

completely enthralled. Eventually she bent down and pulled them off her feet and his face fell once more as he regarded the empty, lifeless socks.

“Hang on pops,” she laughed, picking up one of his feet, “this’ll just take a few moments, it’s tricky to get your toes in the right holes...hang on, don’t wiggle yet! Ok, there.”

Kitty sat back and watched as the old man watched his socks wiggling backwards and forwards, googly eyes spinning. While he was sidetracked, she tried to clean the bed as best she could, desperately wishing she had a hoover but unable to find one lurking in any of the numerous cupboards that were dotted about the place.

“Warm socks...Kitty...” he laughed as she fluffed his pillow.

“Smelly socks,” she agreed, before pretending to smell them and making a bad face.

After a few minutes he let her lay him down in the bed, pulling the musty blankets over him as he snuggled down, looking as content as if he were in the midst of luxurious quilts and furs, which she guessed, in his mind he probably was.

“What were you doing outside pops?” she asked him finally, picking up the two books he’d given her and sat down on the side of the bed.

There was a garbled sentence, but there was the look of fear in his eyes. Kitty nodded as if she understood, that bird scared her and as she ran a hand across her cheek, felt the sting of where the claws had got her.

“Do you live here?” she continued, looking at the massive book carefully.

It looked ancient, heavy leather binding dark with age with nothing written on it, the sheer weight of it was pressing down on her knees even now.

“Where were you taking the book?” she asked him curiously, running a hand across the spine.

“Cold...Tom...Kitty...Bird...Jelly Baby...” he mumbled, staring at the book avidly now.

Kitty tried to make sense of the sentence but shook her head, nothing but meaningless words again. She slowly pulled the creaking pages open, finding the first page taken up with curling script, written in ink and probably even a feather pen she guessed. It was nothing but a list of names and addresses, but not the sort of addresses she was used to.

“Branwen Greene, Cot next to brother Graham, 2nd Floor, Cottingham Cottage, Next to the Party Tree, Wembury,” she read out quietly, “Daughter of Edgar Greene and Mary Ann Greene nee Alcright - Pure of Bloode.”

The man nodded solemnly and she squinted at the date written next to the name, “17th daye of Maye, in the year 1674!”

Kitty looked up at the man in surprise, “This is a really old book!”

He nodded and she scanned down the names, all dated 1674 until suddenly it turned to 1675. It was just a book of people, their names, their parents, their address and birthdays. What could it possibly be used for? She managed to heave the pages until she was near the end of the book, it fell open and she read the year 1979.

She scanned through this, surprised to find almost immediately her eyes were drawn to one entry.

“Hermione Jane Granger, Large Bedroom, The Heights, Armada Way, Kent,” she said in some surprise, “Daughter of Edward Granger and Susan Granger nee Braithwaite - Born of Muggles. 30th September 1979.”

“Kent,” she scoffed under her breath, “figures.”



Born of muggle, she noted curiously however, before realising with a sudden flash of insight that it must just be a census of everyone in the country and she began to flick through the pages until she could find her own entry.

“1980,” she read with some satisfaction, beginning to scan through the names, not recognising any of them.

Then however she stumbled upon another name that was familiar.

“Ronald Billius Weasley, Bedroom beneath the Ghoul, Third floor, The Burrow, Ottery St. Catchpole,” she murmured, taking note of the word ‘ghoul’, “Son of Arthur Weasley and Margaret Weasley nee Prewitt - Pure of Blood. 19th March 1980.”

It slowly dawned on her that her entry wouldn’t be in a book like this - this was a book for Harry’s world, not hers. With this thought however she began to turn the pages until she came to July, where she should have been. And there he was.

“Harry James Potter, Nursery, Potter Mansion, Ladies Walk, Tintagel,” she whispered in amazement, “Son of James Harold Potter and Lily Potter nee Evans - Pure of Blood.”

She stared at it for some time before realising there was more written underneath - The Cupboard Under the Stairs, 4 Privet Drive, Little Whinging, Surrey.

The Smallest Bedroom, 4 Privet Drive, Little Whinging, Surrey.

Room 17, Railview Hotel, Cokeworth.

The Floor, Hut-on-the-Rock, The Sea.

“Harry lived under the stairs?” she exclaimed to herself.

“Harry,” repeated the old man, eyes alight again.

“You know Harry?” she asked, almost forgetting he was there, watching her.

“Harry...socks...Jelly baby...baby...scar...” burbled the old man.

“Scar - yes that’s him!” she said excitedly, shuffling towards the man, “Harry Potter!”

“Potter...” repeated the man.

“Potter,” confirmed Kitty, before reaching up to her forehead and racing a zig zag down her forehead.

“Harry Potter,” nodded the man, reaching up and drawing the same scar along his own forehead.

She sat back, feeling immensely pleased with herself for some reason, as if a small battle had been won.

“Kitty,” he said, pointing to her again and nodding.

“Kitty,” she nodded again, running her fingers across her cheeks as if she had cats whiskers.

“Kitty cat,” he laughed.

“That’s right,” she grinned, repeating the sign

“Medusa,” he added, tugging one of her braids.

She laughed, “No, there not snakes...just hair...” before pointing to him, “you?”

He seemed to give this some thought.

“Albus,” he said finally, showing her his feet, snug in the toe socks and wiggling them.

“Albus,” she said delightedly, wagging her fingers as he’d done with his toes.

“Kitty,” he said again, doing the sign for her whiskers, “Harry.”

She nodded, then made the sign for Kitty, then a heart, then Harry, “Kitty loves Harry.”

The man called Albus repeated this, thought about it for sometime, then began to laugh, “Harry love Kitty...”

“I hope so,” she laughed, then thought about why she’d been outside in the first place.

“Harry’s sick,” she said sadly, then seeing his look of incomprehension, drew a lightning bolt on her forehead then tried to make a general look of being ill.

The man suddenly looked very distressed and Kitty tried to calm him down.

“They’re making him better,” she reassured him, yet he didn’t look placated.

“Remus Lupin?” she tried, hoping he’d recognise the name.

There was the glimmer of recognition and after a thoughtful moment she made up a sign for him, though unfair, described him best. She raised her hands like claws, bared her teeth and barked.

“Woof...” repeated Albus, making the face too, “Remus...”

“Yes, that’s right, you know them all don’t you? And Tonks?” she made a gesture that indicated she had hair that kept changing length.

“Tonks...” repeated the man.

“Moody?” she tried, squinting an eye at him and making it move strangely.

“Mad...Eye...Mad...” he told him, doing the same.

“That’s right, he’s got a really crazy eye, and who else?” she mused out loud, “Ron?”

She motioned that he had lots of freckles, “Hermione,” she indicated big hair, which considering the circumstances she thought she was being particularly nice, “Matron,” she made indicated a big hat and a spoonful of medicine, “Snape,” she put on a scowl and scrunched up her nose.

He repeated them all and she was happy to see he knew exactly who everyone was, he just couldn’t seem to talk about them, he could even make signs up for people on his own that she could understand. Finally she gave a laugh, “Harry will be better soon.”

He nodded, still looking worried again, then made a motion for Albus then feigned being sick.

“You’re sick?” she asked him, “Albus is sick?”

He nodded again, then began to murmur to himself, settling into his pillows.

“Who makes Albus better?” she asked, then made a sign for Matron.

Slowly, the old man shook his head.

“No one? Not Remus, Tonks, Snape, Matron?”

He shook his head, before making one more sign - Kitty.

“I wish,” she said almost to herself sadly.

“Sssh,” he whispered, raising a trembling hand to his lips.

“It’s a secret?” she asked in confusion, “No ones allowed to know your sick, why?”

Albus merely snuggled into his mouldy pillow and watched some dust motes float past.

“Are you tired now Albus?”

He shook his head and she was surprised, he really was beginning to understand everything she was saying. She picked up the second book he’d given her and looked at the title again.

“Shall I read to you?” she asked him, before motioning the book towards him.

Albus nodded, before making another lightning shape on his forehead.

“Harry?” she said in confusion, before looking down at the book, “Harry’s in this book?”

He nodded and eagerly Kitty began to leaf through the pages, looking for the most recent dates towards the back. Finally it landed open on a page titled ‘Hogwarts Interhouse Quidditch Season 1991-92’, that would have made him 11 she guessed and she scanned down the list of matches played in the game Tonks had recently tried to explain to her.

“Gryffindor won,” she said, looking at the finals result, before flipping over the page, “1991-92 Gryffindor House Team...woah!”

The book clattered to the floor and Albus jumped, panicked ramblings filling the air again as Kitty tried to apologise, calm him down whilst trying to stop her heart hammering so hard. She hated moving photos. Opening the book up again slowly, she braced herself for the team photo that greeted her, players all waving and cheering as they lifted up a shield, looking none the worse for her having slammed a load of pages on top of them. Slightly tentatively she turned the page and looked at the back, as if somehow she was being tricked, but it really was a moving photo.

Albus was watching her, grinning in a vague sort of way that people do when confronted with somebody acting, to their mind, in a slightly crazy fashion.

“Harry,” he said, reaching out with a long finger and prodding the photo.

Sure enough, when she looked properly at the photo, there was a miniature Harry, looking young and weedy and completely different to the Harry she knew. She began to laugh, “He’s so short!”

She looked below the picture to see the caption read the names of the players, a small number following Harry’s name. She guessed it was a page number and flicked forward to find a page with the title ‘Youngest Seeker in a Century’. Enthralled she read the article out loud for Albus who probably didn’t understand but who listened nonetheless. Finally when she finished he gave her a proud smile and then motioned for her to turn back.

She continued to flick through until she came across another team photo, “1972-73 Gryffindor House Team...oh my...that’s Harry?”

And it was, looking slightly older, but unmistakable wild black hair and grin...Then she looked at the date again and felt even more confused, “1972? But Harry wasn’t even born then...”

And then a horrible idea floated into her mind, maybe he was...this place is magical after all...

She stared into the distance as she did the maths, that’d make him...36! She looked at Albus, who was looking at her as someone who hadn’t heard the punch line to a joke and was waiting for the comedy to arrive.

“Harry’s 36?” she practically yelped.

He looked at her suspiciously and Kitty turned back to the photo, taking it in a kind of horrified trance. It was there in plain colour, black

hair, lanky frame, brown eyes, his grin, even his tendency to scrunch his nose a certain way...

Brown eyes, are you crazy? Harry has green eyes she reminded herself, his contact lenses are brown...

So who did that make this person?

James Potter (Chaser)

The caption said it all. She laughed out loud in relief, quite glad the only person to witness her temporary insanity was someone who was insane.

"It's Harry's dad," she laughed and Albus finally got the gist, nodding along.

"James," he nodded, before running his hand through hair.

"James?" she confirmed, repeating the sign Albus had made up, curious as it was - Harry's dad was obviously vain about his hair.

"The complete opposite of Harry then," she murmured under her breath.

Albus was still laughing but after a moment pulled another book from a shelf just next to his bed, handing it to her. She opened it up, prepared herself for the sight of moving pictures and took in the sepia and black and white photos that were all waving and grinning. She couldn't recognise anyone but he seemed to think she would and showed her each one with an encouraging, mischievous smile, as if they were sharing in some big secret that no one else could know. She humoured him for some time until she came across a face she vaguely recognised.

"It's you," she said happily, "a long time ago, by the looks of things?"

It sure was, the Albus in front of her looked barely into his twenties, with short auburn hair and twinkling blue eyes. He was dressed in a

Victorian looking suit with a woman in similarly old fashioned dress clasped against his arm.

“Who’s the beautiful lady you’ve got here Albus?” she asked interestedly, studying the picture.

He merely nodded, making the sign for love but saying nothing more.

“An old sweetheart,” she said sadly, before turning the page onwards.

Finally she flipped onto the one he must have been waiting for as he gave an excitedly murmur. Kitty stared at it as if entranced, it was Albus, looking alert and as normal as was possibly wearing a star covered robe and an admiral’s hat. On either side of him was what Harry would look like in only a few years time, if he took to wearing pink and yellow bonnets and on the other side, where his green eyes obviously came from. His mother was beautiful, long red hair, the sort that no one would dare call ginger because it was too deep, and twinkling green eyes like Harry when he laughed - although she doubted he’d ever wear a pink cowboy hat that had rhinestones studded onto it. And there, in the arms of the beaming admiral was a tiny baby - Harry.

“Christmas,” stated Kitty, staring at the festive four.

A tree was visible in the background and decorations were strung about, there was even a party hat for the baby, a tiny wizards hat.

“A perfect Christmas,” she said, feeling for some reason a sudden rush of emotion she couldn’t quite explain.

Something to do with the fact all that had been taken away from Harry perhaps, or maybe just the jealousy that at least he could have had it, whereas it was never even a possibility for her.

“My mother died on Christmas Day,” she said, almost to herself because she knew he wouldn’t understand.



He didn't, he just made his usual mumblings and stared at the picture as Harry's parents looked over to each other laughing.

"And my dad..." she said, before trailing off.

Albus was staring at her intently.

"Harry's really sick, pops," said Kitty in a quiet voice, "and I know you probably don't understand what I'm saying, but...but I thought I'd be able to save him...I'm thought I'd done enough...but he's still slipping away from me..."

Albus began to mutter under his breath at this, sounding panicked and upset Kitty tried to calm him down, but all she could think about was Harry. Lying in that bed, skin yellow, cheeks hollow, dying...

Albus suddenly started to cough and Kitty jumped slightly, as if she'd forgotten that he was even there.

"Here," she croaked, walking over to him and pulled the musty blankets back over him, "you're sick...you need some sleep...and some help."

"No help...Kitty...help..." came the muttered response, as he snuggled down.

"I can't help you," she said, tears still falling down her cheeks, "I can't help anyone..."

"Kitty...help me..."

It came out almost as a plead and she stared into the old mans eyes.

"I'll tell them about you, the nurse can help you..." she said, slightly bitterly, "although they can't help Harry so I wouldn't get your hopes up."

The old man closed his eyes wearily, and Kitty watched in astonishment as he fell asleep almost instantly. After a few moments Kitty opened the book again and looked at the photo of Harry. Knock knock.

Tonks blearily pulled open her eyes, feeling as if they were actually made of lead and her entire body as still deeply asleep.

“Mmm,” she tried to call, weak reply surprising her.

The door creaked open and she woke up enough to smile widely as Remus walked in, trying to balance a tray of food and hold the door. He gave her a smile that made her feel happy to be ill enough to be waited on hand and foot.

“Food for the patient,” he whispered, as if she were still asleep, “are you hungry?”

“Not really,” she managed to croak out, before coughing violently.

He sat down on the side of her bed and stared down at her in worry, pulling a glass of water out of mid air. She drank it slowly and finally gave him a proper smile.

“That’s better,” she laughed, voice still sounding gravely.

“How are you feeling?” he asked, brushing a piece of sombre black hair off her face, “Any better?”

“Better now you’re here,” she said shyly, surprising herself by blushing.

He gave another wide smile and busied himself in helping her sit up, positioning pillows and picking up the tray.

“Pumpkin soup again I’m afraid,” he said, balancing it on her legs, “Molly’s made enough to last a month I think.”

“Mmm, my favourite,” she joked, prodding it half-heartedly with the spoon.

Remus watched her for a moment before asking, “How are you really feeling?”

“Glad I’m out of hospital,” she replied, “I just want to get back to work now.”

“Come on Tonks,” he said sternly, “working yourself into the ground is what got you into the mess in the first place.”

“Well, you know what? Money doesn’t just appear out of thin air,” she snapped back, taking offence to his reprimand, “I’ve got my goblins loan to think about, and my mom.”

“I know,” he sighed, leaning towards her, “I wasn’t having a go at you Tonks...I just think that you cant carrying on making yourself sick...you might not wake up next time.”

“Its not life threatening Remus,” she replied, slightly mollified by his concern now.

“This time,” he said quietly, tucking her hair behind her ear again, “but what if you’d fallen down stairs instead? Or if you’d gone into work that day...your reflexes are going to be dulled for a while Tonks, and in you’re line of work...that’s not safe...”

She gazed into his grey eyes for a long moment, thinking about what he’d said, about how worried he sounded. She was amazed that she could see real emotion in there, not just the carefully blank slate she was used to.

“I’m just worried about you,” he told her, taking her cheek in his hand and rubbing his thumb along it, “I always have been.”

“I know,” she whispered, smiling weakly.

He gave a flicker of a smile, leaning forward and placing a long kiss on her lips, which she returned softly, closing her eyes and feeling that familiar feeling of unbelievable luck washing over her again. Remus shuffled forward even more, weaving his fingers through her long, black hair and Tonks ignored her swimming head. This was what she'd been waiting for, dreaming of, for so long...

There was an unexpected knock at the door and suddenly they had broken apart and Tonks was left reeling in confusion.

Molly Weasley bustled in, plate in hand, completely oblivious to what she'd just interrupted.

"Good morning Tonks, I just thought you might like some soda bread with that soup?" she said, placing the plate down on the tray on Tonks' lap, which had become slightly dislodged now.

"Oh...er...thanks, Molly," she managed to stutter, still slightly confused by the dramatic turn of events.

Behind Mrs Weasley, Remus was trying not to suppress a smile.

"You're looking a bit flushed," she said anxiously, leaning down and taking Tonks' temperature with the back of her hand.

Remus' shoulders were shaking with silent laughter.

Tonks studiously avoided looking at him.

"I'm ok, Molly," she said innocently.

"Now, have you taken your potion?" she asked her sternly.

"Yes Molly."

"Good girl," she said, standing up, "Mr. Lupin, you'd best let her rest, she hasn't got the energy to be receiving visitors."

Tonks managed to turn her burst of laughter into a spluttering cough.

“Of course Molly,” said Remus easily, “I’m off to Hogwarts anyway, Dumbledore’s coming back today, and I bet Cathy’s doing no better.”

“Poor girl,” said Molly and Tonks shot Remus a surprised look, “clever of her to think of drawing the Death Eaters, really.”

“She’s a clever girl,” pointed out Tonks.

“Yes well...I do hope they manage to catch them,” she replied, nodding to herself.

Remus and Tonks shared another incredulous look, before Mrs Weasley began to usher Remus out.

“Bye Molly,” called Tonks, before looking over to Remus sadly, “bye.”

“Rest well,” he replied, shutting the door.

He poked his head back around it quickly, mouthing ‘see you later’ whilst Molly was unawares.

“Albus?” Kitty was exclaiming emphatically.

It was the morning after her discovery of the old man locked in the tower and Kitty was attempting to get the matron to go and help him.

She was looking faintly puzzled.

“Old man? Blue eyes?” she suggested, wondering if they even knew the man, he certainly knew them.

“Professor Dumbledore?” she guessed, looking vaguely troubled.

“Possibly,” she nodded, “well, whoever he is, he’s sick and he needs you to go and see to him.”

“Professor Dumbledore isn’t here,” the Matron told her, “he’ll be back tomorrow.”

“He is here,” she replied, “he’s upstairs, in a musty old room and he needs some help.”

“I don’t think so Cathy,” replied the Matron, looking back up to the shelf of glass bottles and inspecting some labels, “he’s at the International Confederation of Wizards.”

“No, he’s here,” stated Kitty.

The Matron seemed to pay no attention to this and Kitty frowned deeply.

“Just come with me and if he’s not there, then I’m sorry to have wasted your time.”

“Cathy, Professor Dumbledore is not here, but he will be here tomorrow, now please stop this silliness,” she said curtly, picking up a bottle and examining the contents carefully.

Kitty placed her hands on her hips as she stared at the woman, silliness?

“Why won’t you even come to see?” she demanded.

“Cathy, I’m very busy-”

“So? He’s really sick and he needs help, and that’s your job!” she exclaimed, “so help him!”

“I must go and see to Harry,” she replied firmly, taking the bottle with her and walking out of the office.

Kitty was left staring after her with a mixture of shock and annoyance plastered across her face.

To Kitty's increasing frustration, every person she managed to find in the castle that day had the same reaction to her news.

Albus wasn't here. He was at a conference. He'd be back tomorrow.

She began to suspect that far from just not believing her, the witches and wizards weren't even hearing what she said, and couldn't decide whether this was due to the fact that she was a muggle, she was the 'Infamous Cathy' or something more sinister.

She noted that they seemed to have faintly troubled expressions upon their faces as she spoke to them, as if what she was saying was puzzling. Yet she was always dismissed.

She began to suspect magic was involved.

And then corrected herself, more magic was involved.

She finally gave up, flopping into the chair next to Harry's bed and stared at him with a faint frown on her face. Almost absentmindedly she took the small CD player and headphones Remus had fixed and placed them carefully over Harry's ears, starting up the music before leaning back again and watching his features carefully for any sign of movement.

"I bet you know who Albus is, don't you Harry?" she asked pensively, "He certainly knows who you are."

She didn't expect even a flicker of recognition or movement from Harry but was still disappointed when it didn't come. She preferred it when Harry replied to her conversations.

Or appreciated the music she tried to introduce him too.

"I bet you'd probably reckon he's coming back tomorrow though too, wouldn't you?" she suggested, mulling this thought over, "so obviously there's some sort of spell that's making everyone forget about him, not realise he's missing, isn't there?"

She bit her thumbnail absentmindedly, so there were two people at Hogwarts who were now ailing?

“Maybe this is related to you Harry?” she speculated, “Perhaps he’s been made sick on purpose? By the same people who did this to you? Something incurable...”

She jumped at the words that had come out of her mouth before she could think, where had incurable come from?

“Something hard to cure,” she corrected self-consciously, as if Harry would hear this despite the music, “and now there’s a spell to stop people realising and to keep him sick?”

She felt quite proud of her deduction skills for a moment before she realised what she’d just said.

“So how’s anyone going to be able to help him?” she whispered anxiously, “If they won’t acknowledge his existence?”

She shuddered at the thought, how was she even going to figure out how to stop this if everyone she spoke to wouldn’t even listen to her? Before she could come to any sort of an opinion, the Hospital Wing doors opened and the group of teenagers Kitty had been diligently avoiding walked in.

Didn’t they have anything better to do than to keep interrupting her rare moments alone with Harry?

They saw her sitting at Harry’s bedside and faltered slightly in their steps, before the youngest, ginger-haired girl forced them all forward, striding towards her straight-backed. For a moment she was undecided of what to do, it wasn’t in her nature to concede to anyone except possibly Harry, and she definitely didn’t want to do it for such a bunch of stuck-up snobs.

But, she couldn’t stand her ground this time. She was too tired, upset and stressed to get stuck into another fight with Harry’s friends, she had to figure out how to help Albus.



She wasn't even going to bother seeing if they were affected by the memory-loss spell.

They congregated around the other side of the bed as she climbed stiffly to her feet. There was a long, pregnant pause.

"Good morning," said one of the taller boys, a twin.

"Morning," she muttered, leaning forward and carefully taking the headphones off Harry, stopping the CD.

"What's that?" she heard Ron whispered to Hermione audibly.

There was another pause before Hermione spoke up.

"What's he listening to?" she asked and Kitty almost flinched at the false tones that were layered on top of her anger.

"Bit of punk...The Ramones," she stated, wrapping the cable around the CD player.

"Oh...I don't know them," she replied and Kitty rolled her eyes.

"I'm not surprised," she muttered, angered by her tone, "its not really you're sort of music."

If you were pissed off with someone or hated them, have the guts to say so and leave it at that. Don't pretend everything's fine with sugary sweet tones she thought bitterly. She made to leave without another word, before Hermione stopped her in her tracks.

"How did the interview with the Aurors go yesterday?" she asked loudly.

Kitty hesitated, before carrying on striding away.

"It didn't," she replied.

“What does she mean it didn’t?” Ginny demanded moments later as Kitty walked out of the Hospital Wing doors.

“It means she didn’t do it!” exclaimed Hermione hotly, “I don’t believe it!”

“What a bitch,” Ginny replied in the same tone and Ron, Fred and Gorge nodded silently.

“What is she hiding?” Hermione wondered out loud, “She must have done something she doesn’t want them to see!”

“See?” demanded Ron, only a passing glance directed at Harry before they grouped together.

“Auror interviews include taking memories,” Hermione explained impatiently, “like the pensieve Harry keeps telling us about. It’s used as definitive evidence in the Wizmagot.”

“She definitely hiding something,” Ginny said, flopping down into the seat and scowling at the door, “doesn’t she want to help?”

“Obviously not,” muttered Ron, also glaring at where the girl had last been seen.

“Well, she was probably hiding,” said Hermione scornfully.

They all fell into an angry silence, occasionally sending glances towards Harry. It was hard enough coping with him being like this, but it was even worse not knowing what had happened. For all they knew, she could be the reason Harry was like this.

“She just doesn’t care does she?” asked Hermione in a quiet, yet hard voice, “as long as she’s safe and sound. She probably doesn’t care that those people are still out there, even though she could probably help capture them, lock them away.”

“Yeah well, Azkaban’s probably not the safest place now anymore though, is it?” said Gorge heavily, “And she probably wasn’t even there...she just wont give evidence because it’ll show there’s no reason for us keeping her around.”

“She’ll be gone soon,” said Ginny firmly, “there’s no way she can stay here and she knows it. She just doesn’t want to be kicked out.”

Kitty found her way back to the gargoyle much quicker this time, amazing herself at remembering the twists and turns of the spooky, deserted corridors. She placed her hand on its head just as Albus had done, and tried to remember the nonsensical words he’d muttered, one of which she knew was a password.

“Jelly baby?” was her third, tentative choice and she was pleased to see it spring aside and the stone escalator come into view.

She stepped onto it, impatiently waiting for a few moments before skipping up the steps and pushing the heaven oaken door open. The great oval room was exactly how it had been the night before, dusty and gloomy and smelling as if the ancient air hadn’t been disturbed for centuries. Now that she had had time to think about her memory-loss spell theory she had begun to think about this room even more. If these wizards and witches were using magic left, right and centre, how was she to know what was really going on? For all she knew, perhaps this room had a spell on it; perhaps it didn’t really look like this at all.

The castle had looked liked a ruin to her when she’d first arrived before they’d cast some kind of spell over her, was this the same? It sure was clever thinking if it was - the memory loss spell would be even more believable if she doubted it and came up here and saw this room. You wouldn’t possibly think anyone lived here otherwise.

All this going through her mind, she walked over to the bookcase and began to select certain books, pulling the forward slightly until there was a click and the whole bookshelf swung inwards, revealing the musty bedroom beyond.

And there lying in bed was Pops. Albus. Professor Dumbledore.

He was fast asleep.

Kitty crept in and closed the bookshelf behind her and wandered over to the small table she'd sat at the night before. The Book of Names was still lying open on Harry's page and Kitty re-read it again thoughtfully. Cupboard Under The Stairs? Not even her stepfather was that bad.

She wondered where Albus had been taking the book the night before - was he going to hide it, or was he giving it someone? For a moment the image of the evil bird screeching at the old man filled her mind, before she banished it quickly. No bird would want, or need, a book. But maybe they were just the messenger? Delivery person as it were. But then why would anyone want it? It was just a book of names - who needed to know that?

Behind her came a sleepy yawn and she turned to see foggy blue eyes focussing on her.

She carefully got up and knelt by the bed, "Good morning Albus."

He was back to nonsensical rambling again, but he used the 'sign' they'd devised for Kitty so at least he recognised her.

"I told everyone I could find," she whispered to him, not even sure he'd understand, "no one believed me. Apparently you're at a conference, won't be back until tomorrow."

The old man gave a cross between a smile and a frown and she gave a helpless sigh.

"I don't know what to do Pops," she told him anxiously, "who'll believe me? How do I help you?"

The old man shook his head sadly and struggled to sit upright. She helped him up and arranged some mangy pillows around his head. She began to cough at the dust motes but he seemed completely

unaffected, proving her previous theory that there was a spell on the room. It wasn't rotting at all.

When he was finally settled he began to gesture over to his book case, making anxious noises. Silently, she walked over to it and began to point to certain books. One after another, he shook his hand, made angry noises or said random words, until finally he gave a happy nod of his head.

She pulled the book off the shelf and looked at the front cover.

"Haelstroms Hexes and Healings?" she read with some difficulty.

She looked over to him curiously.

"You want me to read this?" she asked slowly, "Is it important? Will it tell me how to fix you?"

He muttered something incoherent, but nodded all the same.

"Alrighty then," she said heavily, flopping back into her seat and flicking to the index.

It was written in tiny letters and was faded in some places, but she persevered.

"Ok, Aanapalaties Axe Bending Hex?"

A shake of the head.

And on she went, slowly but surely making her way through the alphabet.

Harry stared ahead at the pitch blackness. He must have been staring, he still had eyes didn't he? And they were open, weren't they? Therefore, he was staring ahead at nothing.

No light, no dark, just black. Forever waiting.

Not a lot went through his mind, thoughts and memories were as insubstantial as mist. In a way it made his time in the timeless place easier, he had no idea how long he'd been here, so it didn't worry him.

He turned his head slightly, and out the corner of his eyes he saw the black dog sitting next to him. Looking almost like a cut out that had been stuck on top of a big piece of black paper. It didn't look real, but occasionally shifted position slightly, also staring ahead.

And waiting.

Harry turned his gaze back to the rolling blackness in front of him. He knew someone was sitting on his other side, but he didn't dare to turn and look at him. He already knew who it was, and that was why he was scared.

Severus Snape was sitting at his desk in the dungeon that was usually a classroom full of chattering students. Hogwarts was always so much better when the students weren't in it. He'd always had the feeling that students ruined a school. He was poring over a large text, trying to discover why Potter wasn't reacting to anything he'd given him.

It wasn't that he cared about him, he just hated the fact that he couldn't do something.

He'd even shoved a Bezoar down his throat out of desperation this afternoon, and nothing.

What made it even worse was that he couldn't get any information from his colleagues. Things were a bit...disorganised...of late. And he'd been hearing rumours. Rumours that worried him and could potentially drastically alter his plans.

He filed away these thoughts and turned his attention back to the book. It was one of the lesser known texts on the subject. In fact, he knew that this was the only copy in existence, and he treated it reverentially, pushing his cup of black coffee far away from it.

He had reached a new section on Chameleon Poisons when there was a short knock on the door. He looked up suspiciously, before

carefully closing the book, sliding the clasp upon the leather cover shut so it was locked safely, and hid it in a draw.

“Enter.”

The muggle girl sidled into the room and Snape stared at her a moment in surprise.

“Well?” he demanded finally.

She didn’t reply straight away, walking through the desks quickly until she stood in front of his own. He narrowed his eyes at her, noticing that she had a piece of parchment clasped in her hand.

“Albus Dumbledore sent me,” she stated.

Snape continued to watch her and was aware that the girl had started to smile. Unbeknown to him, Kitty had just watched the light of suspicion leave the mans’ eyes, it was like a shutter going down, and she knew that now he would never argue with her.

“I have a list of things here he would like. I want you to fetch them, place them in a cauldron and give them to me.”

Wordlessly Snape took the list she handed him and climbed to his feet. Kitty watched with an incredulous look on her face as he walked over to the stores - it had actually worked! No questions, no protestations. Whatever the spell was that was upon the wizards and witches, it was good. She quite liked the feeling of power, knowing this great secret, that she was the only one that could help - not such a useless muggle after all!

“Here,” came a voice, and a small cauldron packed full of jars and packets was placed on the desk beside her.

She looked through everything, unable to stop feeling a little disappointed. It didn’t really look that magical - it smelled like the Chinese supermarket, and the cauldron was tiny. What happened to

stereotypical cauldrons that were so big a tribe of cannibals could dine for a month from it?

“Is that everything?” she demanded, almost hoping for a sprinkling of fairy dust.

He nodded wordlessly, placing the list on top of the cauldron and handing it to her. She took it, gave her thanks and walked down through the aisles of desks, taking her time to study the room and wonder if this was Harry’s classroom.

When the door slammed shut Snape looked at it for a second, before shaking his head wordlessly and looking around the room in confusion. Already the memory of the strange visitor had slipped out of his mind and after a moments hesitation he sat back at his desk, pulled out the book and continued to read.

As if nothing had even happened.

“Heya Pops!” called Kitty happily as she walked into the great office once more, “Albus!”

She went into the bedroom to find the old man sat on the bed, watching her with a strangely alert gleam in his eye.

“Is someone feeling better?” she asked, placing the cauldron full of ingredients on the table.

In reply she was met by a stream of gibberish and she sighed slightly, so much for that.

“Well, that doesn’t matter I guess,” she began, unpacking the various pouches and vials of ingredients, “because we’re gonna cook you up some sanity. And then, you’re gonna get better! I bet you can’t wait right?”

Albus shuffled over and began to pick up the various packets and smell them, muttering in what she generally thought to be an approving tone. Today he was wearing a red and gold satin robe over



his pyjamas which trailed to the floor, his slippers barely poking out. She smiled slightly, it didn't matter to her that he was a little bit crazy, he was the only wizard she knew she could trust. She thought she could trust Tonks and Remus, but there was still a little bit of her that whispered policewoman...still the little voice in her head that replayed all those horror movies she'd watched, that said werewolf.

Kitty, who had been staring at nothing as she thought this, zoned back in as she caught sight of a sudden flash of gold.

Albus has a tarnished gold ring with a black stone in the centre on his finger. She stared at it for a moment, wondering why she'd never noticed it before, why the hairs on the back of her neck stood on end.

"Where did you get this Pops?" she wondered aloud, reaching for it.

The old man suddenly jerked his hand away from her with a speed that surprised her - he was usually so frail and slow moving. He had a furious expression on her face and all at once she was scared, holding her hands up in a conciliatory gesture.

"I'm sorry Albus!" she said quickly, "I didn't mean to be rude...I was just curious."

He glared at her moodily for a second, cradling the hand and ring towards him for a moment. And then all at once he made a sudden move and Kitty jumped, seeing a flash of a wand before...

Kitty looked around herself quickly in confusion. She was sitting inside some kind of musty old bedroom, full of broken furniture and spider webs. She shook her head for a moment, she couldn't even remember going into it and she stood up, feeling slightly unnerved. In front of her was a desk, littered with old paper and books and she began to back out of the room.

Had she been sleep walking, she thought vaguely, she must have been...she couldn't even remember leaving the Hospital Wing. She began to hurry forwards, practically running down the stairs, not looking back until she'd ran the length of the school and had come to

the entrance hall. She hated the thought that she wasn't in control of something.

She was too busy pondering her newly acquired talent for sleepwalking to notice she'd known exactly how to get out of the room and her way through the castle.

If Kitty had been more suspicious of her dealings with Albus, she may have written down what she knew somewhere, just in case. The memory was a wonderful thing, but unfortunately, it was a little too easily manipulated in this place. It would be something that she would have to learn the hard way, and something she wouldn't even be aware of until some days later.

Until that time she wouldn't know who Albus Dumbledore was, remember her trip to get supplies from Professor Snape, be able to recall the nightmare bird from the previous night. As she sat on her favourite spot, overlooking the valley from the high wall, she dwelt on other things, completely unaware of the knowledge of her first healing at Hogwarts was underway. Unaware that the old centaurs' prophecy was right. Unaware that within a few hours she'd perform a miracle, and figure out what was wrong with Harry.

And that in less than two days, he'd wake up.

AN/ So, I know, I know I promised to update sooner. But in less than three weeks I FINISH my university career and become an ever-so-scary-graduate. Unfortunately, they don't hand out degrees any more and demand work in return for those little letters after my name! But GOOD news, my dissertation is over and handed in, and now I am excavating for three weeks - EVENINGS OFF. This means much fanfiction writing!

I know this chapter is a little out of the blue and I am GOBSMACKED that only one or two people noticed that Dumbledore was COMPLETELY missing from the past 300 pages! Kudos to those that berated my lack of Dumbledore-action, the rest of you...SHAME be upon you! Lol, only joking, I hope you can see what the hell I'm trying to do! And if not, all shall become clear.

Gotta love anyone that calls the most powerful wizard in the world  
Pops.

## Chapter Twenty Five

### Awakenings and Arguments

Come up to meet you,  
Tell you I'm sorry,  
You don't know how lovely you are,  
I had to find you,  
Tell you I need you,  
Tell you I'll set you apart,  
Tell me your secrets,  
And ask me your questions,  
Oh let's go back to the start.

The next day Kitty spent alternatively sitting either with the lifeless Harry or outside smoking the last of the cigarettes Tonks had given her. She'd had an odd feeling all day, almost restless, like she knew she should be doing something, but couldn't think what.

But then again, she reasoned, she felt like that every day here.

Finally she found herself back upon familiar territory, sitting at Harry's side after a particularly unpleasant nightmare. She hadn't realised it was possible to get them during afternoon naps. She watched him for a good few hours, not moving from her seat as she went over all the questions she had, all the worries, everything the nightmares forced her to dwell on and think about. What if Harry was angry with her, what if she found she was angry with him, would he get better, what would it mean if he did, what would happen to her...the list was never ending. After a while she lent forwards and picked up his limp hand.

There were practically no signs of life. If his chest hadn't have been steadily rising and falling she would swear he was dead. He was too pale, had lost so much weight...he didn't even look like himself anymore, just some kind of waxwork...She couldn't help but let the tears that had been collecting in her eyes roll down her cheeks as she felt her chest tighten, why wasn't he awake yet?

"Come on Harry, wake up," she pleaded quietly, squeezing his hand slightly, "please, wake up..."

Not even a flicker, no sign of movement beneath his lids, even a wiggle of the toes would be something she thought desperately. She squeezed his hand again.

“Squeeze back Harry,” she asked him tearfully, “come on, just show I’m not alone here...”

Not even a twitch.

More tears rolled down her face now and she raised his hand up, giving it a small kiss. She didn’t expect it to work now, she just wished with every single bone in her body that he’d just give her a smile, tell her not to worry, laugh at her for crying, make fun of her accent, even rant and storm at her, anything...

But it wasn’t to be. She was here, he was here, but she was alone...She lay her head down on the side of his bed, staring at the blankets ahead of her, mind once again returning to that night – that night when everything changed, forever. Her whole life had been altered, set on a new course, because of those few hours. When everything had gone bad, when everything had been ruined...

She suddenly remembered being in the car, and the paramedic cutting her out, asking questions.

‘Have you been drinking or taking any illegal substances?’

That’s what he’d asked her and she gave a choked, humourless laugh, she wished she had. She wished all of this was some terrible nightmare, some psychedelic trip, that her and Harry had just been high and there was no such thing as magic and werewolves and hospital wings of castles.

This thought still running around in her mind she closed her eyes and breathed in deeply, he didn’t even smell like him anymore...

Suddenly her eyes snapped open, an idea had just exploded into her mind like a bright firework in the dead of night. She sat up quickly,

pulling her hand out of Harry's and staring at him with wide eyes. For a few moments she could do nothing, not even move or breathe in case the thought slipped away suddenly.

Then, when she had thought about it for a few more moments, she sprang into action.

She all but launched herself at the cupboard next to his bed, she'd seen them put them away, they hadn't even looked at them, where were they? She pulled open the draw and with fumbling fingers pulled out a brown file.

She laid it out on his bed and stared at them for a moment before opening it up and scanning over the reams of scrawled doctors notes. She had brought them from her hospital but no one had cared, they hadn't even looked....

And there it was, in black and white;

Toxicology.

Kitty ran down the corridors, wondering wildly where everyone had got to, the place was completely deserted. She knew for a fact Harry's friends were here, she'd heard them poke their head around the corner and watch her with Harry earlier and his mother had been in a few times to talk to the matron.

Why are they never around when you actually want them to be she thought desperately, all this time annoying her and now they chose to give her space! Bloody fantastic. She emerged into the hall and after a moments indecision went outside to see if she could see anyone there. She stood at the head of the stairs and gazed across the sweeping lawns for any sign of life, sure enough there they were, standing together by the lakes edge.

Kitty ran down the stairs and across the lawns as fast as she could.

"Oi! Hermione! Ron!" she shouted, skidding to a halt behind them and grabbing the girls arm.

“Ouch!” said Hermione angrily, pulling her arm and away and shooting her an angered look.

“I know what’s wrong!” she said in a rush, completely ignoring her, “Look! I know what’s wrong!”

“What are you babbling about?” said Hermione uneasily.

“Look! It’s says right here!” she cried, shoving the folder into her face, “look!”

Hermione stumbled backwards and took the folder from her hands, scanning across the page.

“Harry’s medical notes? I don’t understand, I know he had an operation...” she said, looking slightly perturbed, “what do you mean...?”

“No!” she said desperately, “don’t you see – look!”

Ron and Hermione shared a worried look and with a roar of frustration tore the folder out of her hands. She looked down at the page, rested her finger next to the word and slowly held it in front of her.

“Look closer,” she said slowly and purposefully as if they were stupid, “what is says right here, what’s wrong with Harry...”

“Toxicology,” murmured Hermione, eyes becoming as wide as saucers.

Kitty stared hard and Hermione, who was staring right back at her with sudden understanding.

“What does that mean?” asked Ron, looking between the two anxiously.

“Poison,” she whispered in disbelief.

“Professor Snape?” asked Hermione timidly, knocking on the heavy wooden door.

“Why Professor Snape?” groaned Ron beside her, “of all people, why him?”

“Who is this guy?” demanded Kitty behind them, still clutching the notes, “lets just tell the nurse!”

“He knows about this sort of thing-”

The door suddenly swung open to reveal the potions master, he surveyed the three with a look of surprise that lasted only a millisecond before being replaced with a sneer. Kitty had no recollection of the meeting yesterday, and judging by Snape’s expression, neither did he.

“What do you want?” he asked, silky smooth voice that caused Kitty to frown.

“ We wanted to ask you about something,” said Hermione breathlessly.

“You know about poisons right?” she challenged, barging past Hermione and standing in front of him, hands on hips.

Behind her Ron and Hermione shared a horrified look.

“Excuse me?” he asked in deadly whisper.

“Harry’s been poisoned!” she told him, jabbing a finger into his chest, “I know he has! What can you do about it?”

Snape stared at her for a long moment, but she was just as good at the dead eye than he was and for a long moment they waited for the first to back down. Eventually Snape stood down, moving sideways to let the three inside the room. Hermione and Ron trailed in Kitty’s wake meekly, trying to look as if they weren’t with her at all.



The dungeon door closed with a reverberating bang and the Professor strode towards them.

“Explain yourself,” he told her, eyes narrowing.

“When we got to the hospital, they tested us, I can’t believe I didn’t remember!” said Kitty, completely ignoring Snape’s menacing air and the other two squirming.

“Tested you?” he asked, arched eyebrow.

“Blood’s I mean, they took blood samples from both of us,” she explained.

“Why?” he asked.

“What do you mean why?” she asked blankly, “they thought we were on drugs I guess. They just do that sort of stuff, anyway, that’s not important-”

“What!”

Everyone turned and stared at Hermione, who was glaring angrily at Kitty.

“You what?” asked Kitty, looking annoyed at her outburst.

“Drugs?” she asked her in an unnaturally high voice, “You and Harry were taking drugs?”

“Did I say that?” demanded Kitty irritably.

“Yes you did, you just said it!” she practically yelled back, “What did you do to him!”

“Hermione,” began Ron awkwardly, nodding significantly to Snape who was following the mounting argument with a delicious smile on his face.

“What did I do to him?” Kitty said incredulously, “Je-sus Christ get some perspective! Harry is lying in a coma and I might’ve just found out how to make him better and you’re still having a go at me!”

“Because maybe that’s the reason why he’s in that bed in a coma!” she shouted tearfully.

“This isn’t my fault!” she yelled back at her furiously.

“If you were taking drugs-” she began, shaking her finger at Kitty.

“We weren’t taking drugs! Harry has never even taken drugs and-”

“But you have right?” accused Hermione, stepping closer.

Kitty stared at her long and hard, unreadable expression on her face. Everyone was waiting silently, even Snape seemed curious as tension crackled in the air.

Finally Kitty turned to the potions master and thrust the file towards him.

“The doctors found stuff in his blood, I don’t know what it all means, but there must be a way that you can find out what is it,” she said stiffly and Snape regarded her steadily, “I know its poison though, it’s got to be...else why hasn’t he woken up? Maybe its something that, I don’t know, feeds off magic or something...that’s why the more you try to make him better, the worse he gets...”

Even though the mood had been so tense a few moments before Kitty sensed a change in the air. Snape had given her a slightly suspicious look, before suddenly striding over to his desk, searching it for something.

“Hasn’t that already been checked?” Ron asked, voice shaking and face pale.

“He’s been tested for all known traceable poisons and potions,” said Snape dismissively, “muggles wouldn’t pick up something we haven’t.”

“Well maybe we can find stuff you can’t exactly because we are muggles or whatever,” shrugged Kitty, annoyed at his tone of voice when he said the word ‘muggles’, “you can do all sorts of stuff with magic it seems, couldn’t you make it so you can’t find a poison?”

“Professor...” said Hermione in a small voice, “could it be...is it an untraceable poison?”

He gave them all a swift look, before a sudden, vampirical smile.

“The essential characteristic of an untraceable potion Granger, is that it’s untraceable.”

“That’s not funny,” snapped Kitty and again Ron made a small noise that indicated he didn’t think they’d make it out alive.

“I’m sorry,” he said in a sugary sweet voice that promised impending doom, “I wasn’t aware I was offending you.”

“Yeah whatever,” waved off Kitty, “listen, now you know what it is, make him better – wake him up.”

“It’s not that simple,” explained Snape, now flicking through a rather large book, “but if this is a possibility then we certainly have a lead to work on.”

“It’s not a lead...this is it,” begged Kitty, walking over to Snape and fixing him with a pleading look, “let’s just...let’s just find out what this poison is and wake him up...”

Snape didn't take the file, gaze only flickering towards it briefly before turning back to his book.

"I can take it from here, I'll go and visit him shortly and test him properly."

"Why don't you take the file?" she demanded, shaking it slightly in front of his face, "it says right here what he's got in him."

"As I said before, I highly doubt that Potter's condition has been discovered by your doctors..." said Snape idly as he continued his search.

"So you're not even going to look?" she asked incredulously.

"Professor, it might be worth a try..." said Hermione in small voice next to her.

Apparently she could put her differences aside long enough to agree with Kitty on at least one thing.

"Granger, I thought you'd have enough brain to realise that They would not go to the lengths of giving him an untraceable potion if it could be discovered by muggle means," he said with a sneer, "I have just told you I will investigate this personally."

"But what if-" began Ron, looking desperately as if he didn't want to speak but felt compelled to.

"If nothing," snapped Snape, glaring at them in turn, "are you potions masters? No. I think you're OWL results prove that. Now I will look into this, in the meantime why don't you just run along and argue more about Potter's state of mind, addled though it is."

Kitty glared at the man, shaking with anger.

"How can I get in touch with Remus, or Tonks?" she asked him in a low, deadly voice, "As you clearly seem unable to even grasp the

simplest of facts or have the slightest care whether Harry gets better or not!"

Snape gave her a swift, furious look, before striding over to the door and holding it open. He waited silently for them to leave and eventually Ron and Hermione slinked out.

"Why won't you help him!" demanded Kitty, loudly now.

"I suggest you leave the thinking to us," Snape told her, grinning humourlessly, "something I'm sure we're more able to do than you."

"You are such a bastard!" she growled angrily, starting forwards.

She was saved from lashing out right there and then by a strong hand that had grabbed the back of her tee shirt.

"I'd go back and spend some time with Potter if I were you," he said evilly, "you're not going to be around much longer."

Then the door was slammed in her face.

Kitty gave it an incredulous look for a moment, too shocked to even be angry, before she kicked the door with her mighty boot violently.

"You arrogant prick!" she yelled, kicking the door again.

"Cathy," began Ron anxiously.

"Do you think I give a flying fuck what you think!" Kitty yelled again through the door, incensed.

"It's probably not a smart idea to-" began Ron anxiously, quickly letting go of her shirt and she whipped around at them.

"Oh for fucks sake," she muttered, barging past them and heading back the way they had come.

“Wait!” called Hermione, also striding after her.

“Leave me alone!” she bellowed back, supremely not in the mood for the snobbish girl now.

“Just tell me what happened and I will,” said the girl quickly as Kitty sped up.

Kitty growled to herself, a whole castle full of...full of...she couldn't even think of word bad enough to describe them, she thought she might have to invent one up, just to convey the sheer stupidity of them.

“Were you on drugs when you were caught,” she demanded, matching her steps behind her now, “is that why he got caught?”

“No!” she practically screamed, whipping around.

“I don't believe you!” Hermione yelled back even louder, “tell me the truth! You were high weren't you!”

“No, we weren't!” she shrieked back, “Harry wasn't on drugs! And no, I wasn't on drugs either! And yes, I have taken drugs, so what! This isn't important!”

“I knew it!” Hermione proclaimed furiously, “I knew you-”

“Hermione,” cut in Ron cautiously, but Kitty acted as if he hadn't even spoken.

“Knew I what?” Kitty asked her dangerously, standing stock-still now with balled-up fists at her side.

Hermione glared right back at her and for a moment they simply stood, waiting for the first to break.

“I know exactly what you think about me,” Kitty began in a low, furious voice, “council estate scum, right? Common as muck, always up to no good, right?”

Hermione didn't reply and Kitty knew exactly what the silence meant.

“Yeah, right, I know exactly what you think of me,” she scoffed, past anger now, “you think just because I'm not smart, that I don't have the perfect family or the proper accent that I'm scum? That I stole Harry away from you, that I fucked his head with drugs! Because there's no way Harry could possibly like me without his mind being screwed!”

“I didn't say that,” Hermione replied fiercely.

“But you're thinking it! I can see it in your fucking eyes!” Kitty spat back, “And do you know what, you're probably right! I'm probably the last thing Harry deserves, but do you know what, you think I'm bad? I'm not half as fucked up as Harry is, and you can't even see it!”

“Don't you dare say that about him!” Hermione retaliated, looking stung.

“I can say whatever I like because it's true! I know! I've seen it! And he's mine! I'm with him! He trusted me to look after him and help him, and maybe I'm not doing a fantastic job, but I'm trying!” she exclaimed, “I'm trying my goddamn hardest and I seem to be the only person in this place who cares if he gets better or not!”

“You're not! We're his best friends, do you understand that? Do even know what that means? What Harry means to us! What you've taken away from us!”

“I've taken nothing away from you,” said Kitty harshly, “and big fucking deal, you're best friends with Harry! So what? He isn't just my boyfriend, he's my best friend and I love him, do you understand what that means?”

Ron and Hermione stared at her in shocked silence.

“No you don’t, because you don’t care about anybody but yourselves! Whether Harry left because of you – is that important? No, it’s not. What Harry did while he was with me, is that important? No! It fucking isn’t!” she ranted, not even realising what she was saying, “You weren’t there when he needed you – I was, so just get over it! So stop attacking me and take a step back and try and work out what’s really going on. Because all you’re doing right now is stopping me from finding out what’s wrong with him, proving my theory that you are so selfish you’d rather see him dying than accepting the fact that I’m here, that I care about him and need him back, ok!”

And with that she turned on her heel and stormed off, leaving Ron and Hermione still as statues, gaping after her.

Remus walked into the library slowly, trying to figure out why Cathy would have found her way into it and what she could possibly be doing. A sudden thumping noise caught his attention and he sourced it, down in one of the stacks of to the left, near the restricted section.

There it was again and after a moment he realised it was the sound of a book falling to the floor. Frowning slightly he edged his way towards the stack, every muscle tensing for the book he expecting to see whinging overhead. However, when he turned the corner he caught sight of Kitty, lying on the floor searching through a stack of books, others littered about around her. Half the bookshelf had been emptied and the whole place looked like she’d just been pulling them out randomly and throwing them away.

“How did you get in here Cathy?” he asked in a quiet, non-threatening voice.

She gave a start and twisted round to look over her shoulder. She gave a frown of annoyance, but nothing more, turning back to her book silently. She had a feverish look on her face.

“I picked the lock,” she finally said, throwing the book aside and pulling another one out, “you got a problem with that?”



He gave a weary sigh, looks like she really was in a really bad mood and he wondered why. After a moment he picked his way through the mess, before lowering himself to the floor in front of her, back leant against the next stack. She shot him an another annoyed look and continued to look through the book with the air of one who didn't really know what they were looking for or how to find it.

“What are you looking for?” he asked her carefully, catching a glance of some of the titles of the book and frowning.

“Poisons,” she said simply, throwing the book aside and pulling another one out.

“Any particular reason why?”

“Because I want to bump off every one of this castle’s small-minded, condescending bastards, one by one,” she snapped, “now go away.”

He couldn't help but stare at her in surprise, she'd seemed so well when he'd seen her yesterday and now she was almost like she was when she first appeared in Hogwarts.

“Anyone in particular?” he continued, unfazed by the behaviour he'd become so used to.

“Hermione,” she hissed viciously, “and then that complete prick Snape, shortly followed by that gimp Ron, who does nothing but just stand there and gape at me...”

Remus nodded along with her, watching as she pulled another book on poisons out, she wasn't serious was she?

“What has she done now?” he asked finally.

Kitty gave a look that said she would probably explode if she had to explain what it was that Hermione had done this time and he nodded quickly, no need to know then.

“Feel better now you’ve done your pretending-to-be-worried-for-the-stupid-muggle bit? Good for you! Now you can just piss off!” she ranted harshly, pulling another book off the shelf violently.

He was a little taken aback but didn’t leave, watching her rip through the pages quickly for a few more minutes.

She looked up to him angrily and he was surprised to see her hands were shaking, “Fuck off!”

“I’m not leaving so save you’re breath,” he told her flatly.

She glowered at him, before turning back to her work, honouring him with the silent treatment. He watched in puzzlement for some time before noticing a piece of paper propped up next to her which she was continually referring to.

“What are you really doing Cathy?” he asked her.

“It’s not important,” she said ferociously.

“Obviously it is,” he pointed out, frowning even more.

“Only to me it seems!” she ranted, “Go away!”

“What is it?” he persisted.

“You won’t believe me, so just leave!”

“Try me.”

She looked up to him, blue eyes challenging. He stared right back and finally she gave a shrug, obviously feeling like it was worth a shot.

“I’m looking up a list of ingredients you can use in an untraceable potion, because Harry’s been poisoned.”

Remus felt his mouth drop open slightly

“Why do you think that?” he asked slowly.

“Because when we were in hospital Harry had a blood test and I’ve got the results here. Nobody even bothered to check him and when I looked the toxicology had this long list of stuff that didn’t look like it should be there.”

He gazed into her honest, almost pleading face as a peculiar sense of realisation steal over him.

“I think there’s something in it that makes you not able to see it, and that whenever you do magic on him, he gets a little worse, like you’re feeding it or something, topping up the batteries or whatever.”

“Why didn’t you tell someone?” he asked her faintly, reaching for the page she was consulting as if in a dream.

“I tried but that bastard Snape wouldn’t believe me, didn’t even look at it, just because it’s not magic! Because I’m not magic,” she ranted suddenly, “and I couldn’t possibly have any idea what’s going on or help in any way! Because I’m useless right! And besides, Ron and Hermione don’t give a toss anyway and the nurse had gone. Tonks wasn’t here and I don’t even know your phone number! So I figured if no one else would do anything about it, I would - retarded as I may be!”

Remus nodded slowly, peering at the list of toxins that had been in Harry’s blood when he arrived in the hospital. He felt his blood run cold...

Kitty, who was still panting heavily from her ranting, boiling anger took one look at his face and almost stopped breathing there and then.

“You recognise them don’t you?” she asked breathlessly.

“A few...” he said slowly, eyes round with surprise, darting down the page, “and I know someone who’ll be able to help us.”

“Really?” she whispered hoarsely, “Honestly?”

“Yes,” he said, climbing to his feet hastily, “follow me.”

She gave him an incredulous look, before also jumping up, ready and eager to go looking more relieved than he'd ever thought he'd seen anyone. He led her out of the stacks, turning around with a sudden though and waving his wand over the books. With a clatter and a rustle of pages they jumped back onto the shelves and he ignored Kitty's gasp as he strode towards the hospital wing.

Some twenty minutes later Kitty found herself once more in Snape's dungeon classroom, this time accompanied by Remus, an older, grey haired witch, the Matron and Hermione and Ron. She sat on a workbench that was stationed next to the cold stone wall, leaning backwards and drawing her knees up towards her. She was still bristling with anger from the way both Snape and Harry's friends had treated her today, and her argument with Hermione kept running through her head. She clenched her fists at her sides, desperately trying to calm herself down and listen to Remus, who was addressing Snape mostly, explaining the medicine notes she'd found and the toxicology report.

“But He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named wouldn't use a poison that could be detected, let alone by muggle healers,” said the Matron almost as soon as Remus stopped talking, “there's just no sense in that!”

“Maybe He hadn't expected him to survive long enough for anyone to have found out?” suggested Remus, as Kitty blanched slightly at the thought.

“Nevertheless,” the woman replied, “poison? I mean, really, that's just so...”

She waved her hand vaguely in the air to indicate what she felt and everyone nodded imperceptibly.

“...Crude?” suggested an elderly woman Kitty had noticed called ‘Minerva’.

“But effective,” cut in Remus, shooting Kitty a quick glance, as if to check up on her.

There was a thoughtful pause in which the sallow faced man Kitty already despised, looked up from his patient gaze on his desk and fixed Remus with a piercing look.

“Read out the ingredients once more, Lupin,” he said, with such a hidden feeling laced onto the man’s name that Kitty looked up curiously.

Obviously there was a bit of history between the two, she thought as she watched Remus’ careful avoidance of the man’s eyes as he busied himself with the list once more.

“Atropa belladonna.”

“Deadly nightshade,” Snape replied at once, tapping a thoughtful finger against his chin, “chief side effects being the decent into a deep, paralytic sleep.”

Kitty shifted uneasily, even she’d heard of deadly nightshade, and the thought of Harry being given it made her stomach turn over. She visualised the list Remus held once more, knowing of a few other things found in his blood which the orderly doing the blood test had ringed in red. She waited with baited breath to find out what they were, and more worryingly, what side effects they’d have.

“Digitalis purpurea,” Remus was saying as Kitty tuned back in.

“Foxglove,” Snape nodded, brushing it off with a lazy lick of the wrist, “any poison worth its salt uses it’s essence as the base liquid.”

Kitty knew foxgloves as well, she’d seen them around the parks but had never realised they were poisonous.

“What else?”

This time the voice belonged to Hermione and Kitty glanced over to see her staring at Remus, pale faced and the merest hint of trembling in her clasped hands.

“Conium maculatum,” Remus said and Kitty was surprised to see Hermione pale visibly at this.

“Hemlock,” she said, beating Snape to his diagnosis, “causes the heart rate to slow and become weak, pupils to dilate, before he - I mean...the victim, to slip into a coma and...”

Kitty narrowed her eyes at the girl before Snape spoke up once more, “If Hemlock was the chief ingredient then it’s natural to assume that wolfsbane would have been the final ingredient? Aconite...causes numbness, aids the coma induced by the hemlock.”

Kitty grimaced at the thought of all those disgusting things being forced into Harry’s bloodstream and found herself raising her hands to her mouth to stop herself being sick at the thought.

“It’s a simple poison then,” said ‘Minerva’, sounding puzzled still, “hemlock, aconite, foxglove, nightshade...these are all common, known poisons...I mean, they’ve been used for centuries.”

“Simple but deadly,” Remus replied, “if you’re going for maximum damage, minimum fuss, why bother with something expensive and difficult to brew?”

“But this is the Dark Lord we’re talking about,” she pressed, “it’s simply not his, well, not his style.”

“It’s actually a complex potion, despite it’s humble origins,” Snape said, rising to his feet and beginning to pace across a short distance of the floor, “the key is getting each ingredient to exactly the right weight and strength, perfectly in ratio with one another, so the side effects do not cancel each other out or work too quickly. A perfect example should quickly incapacitate the victim, but draws out the death considerably.”

“By nearly two weeks?” asked the Scottish lady once more and Kitty really did flinch then.

She made it sound like Harry was close to death's door.

“No,” said Snape flatly, “a few hours at most. No more than three.”

“But why has Potter survived this long then?” she asked in some bewilderment.

“I don't know,” he replied, the distaste in his voice told Kitty he did not like making this statement, “if this muggle record is correct, then he should have been dead within minutes of arriving at the...hospital.”

“It must be something to do with the time period...something must have happened to have halted the progress of the poison so that it did not kill him, only maintain the coma-like state it induced,” mused Remus, glancing at the notes once more.

“Nothing would do that,” Snape scoffed, quickly brushing off Remus' statement, “once it's ingested then it would quickly be absorbed into his bloodstream.”

Kitty looked up at this, brows knitted together in deep concentration.

“Well, obviously something happened,” snapped Remus right back, “we know that it was in his blood so he's obviously been poisoned.”

“I think you're forgetting that this is a muggle medical assessment?” he said, eyebrow arched and mocking smile on his lips.

“So? You said yourself it's not an untraceable poison, they're quite able to pick it up in their tests,” Remus shot back and Kitty listened to the brewing argument with only half an ear, ideas forming in her mind rapidly.

“Hardly! We’re talking about the people that removed his kidney with a knife because it had some slight damage to it!”

“That probably saved his life - this poison was in him and now it’s not - how do you explain that?”

“I don’t, it’s a mistake,” he smirked.

“They made it up then?” Remus asked incredulously.

“Well, how do you explain it?” Snape demanded, on his feet now.

They stood face to face, glaring at each other furiously, tension crackling in the air.

“They pumped his stomach,” Kitty said quietly.

Everyone whipped around to look at her, almost as if they didn’t realise she’d been there or could speak.

“What?” demanded Remus, frowning in confusion.

“They pumped Harry’s stomach!” she said louder, as everything seemed to fall into place, “when we got to hospital he had a massive blood transfusion and they pumped his stomach before surgery!”

Kitty saw Hermione’s mouth drop open as she realised what she meant.

“What do you mean, they pumped his stomach?” asked the Matron fearfully.

“They put a tube down your throat and get out whatever’s in your stomach,” she said quickly as everyone’s face registered a look of utter horror, “they usually do it if you’ve drank too much or overdosed...But they do it before surgery as well...they must have done it to Harry!”



Everyone merely gaped at her for a moment as they tried to digest this information, before Remus looked down at the medical notes once more.

“When would they have done this?” he asked slowly.

“He was in surgery twenty minutes after we got into hospital apparently,” she said, voice trembling now at the memory, “that’s enough time isn’t it?”

“Yes...I think so,” he replied, looking over to Snape momentarily, “When was the poison given to him?”

“I don’t know,” she replied, almost startled by the question - surely if she’d seen someone force feeding his something, she’d have mentioned it by now, “The last time I saw Harry he didn’t look as if he’d been poisoned...then I didn’t see him for twenty minutes maybe?”

She remembered vividly running through that graveyard, diving into the church, hiding under the pews as the vicar was murdered. She had tried so hard to block that moment from her memory, but now she could almost smell the death that was in the air, the breath of the Death Eater as he held her down.

“Cathy?” asked Remus attentively, and she became aware that they were all staring at her curiously, “how long then until you went to the hospital?”

“When I found him again...it was maybe half an hour before we crashed...another half an hour before we were found...ten minutes to the hospital...I don’t remember, I was pretty out of it, by then...”

“That gives us nearly two hours...” Remus said, resting a reassuring hand of her shoulder momentarily as he walked over to Snape, “that’s enough time.”

“Yes, it is,” replied Snape, thoughtfully running an eye over the list of toxins found in Harry’s blood once more with considerably more credence.

“If that’s true...then why won’t he wake up now?” asked Hermione anxiously, “it’s been out of his system for so long!”

“Their initial effects are still present, the coma, weak heartbeat, dilated pupils and the such, because the poison was considerably advanced in its absorption before all this happened,” said Snape, “but the addition of certain other minor ingredients can alter a poison considerably...I believe something must have been added as a safeguard in case someone tried to magically revive him.”

“Something that feeds off magic and makes him worse, you mean?” demanded Kitty angrily, “which is exactly what I said hours ago! I told you that whenever you tried new magic on him he got worse!”

“It seems you were right Cathy,” said Remus, giving her a firm nod, “now what can we do about it?”

“I can brew an antidote,” Snape said, sending a glare towards Kitty for her sudden insightfulness into magical poisons, “it’ll take a few hours at least, without knowing what the missing ingredient is I’ll be working on trial and error.”

“But he’ll wake up?” Hermione asked hopefully, “soon?”

“Yes,” nodded Snape, before turning to McGonagall, “best inform Dumbledore, he’ll want to be back for this.”

“He’s still travelling at the moment,” she replied, already climbing to his feet, “it may be hard to get in touch with him, but he’ll be back tomorrow in any case.”

Everyone began to leave the room, the Matron hurrying back to her wing, Ron and Hermione deep in conversation as they left, closely followed by the older witch. Snape disappeared into the stores and all

that could be heard was glass bottles clinking together and the sound of the sliding ladder being pushed along.

Remus walked over to Kitty, who was still sat huddled on the bench, slightly fazed look on her face.

“Are you ok Cathy?” he asked with some concern, sitting on the bench next to her.

“Yeah, fine,” she said quickly, “it’s just...I can’t quite believe we figured it out...and that he’ll wake up.”

“I think you’ll find that it was you that figured it out, how many times have you saved Harry’s life now?” he joked and Kitty could help but smile faintly.

“Will he be ok, Remus?” she asked uneasily.

“The antidote will wake him up, and then we can fix whatever side effects he’ll have,” he assured her, studying her face carefully.

“Good,” she said weakly, “I can’t wait...”

Remus looked at her for another moment, noting that she was picking at a nail unconsciously and tapping a foot nervously against the bench.

“I know what you’re feeling at the moment Cathy,” he said quietly and she shot him a panicked look, “you’re almost dreading him waking up, aren’t you?”

She avoided his eyes for a long moment, trying to look as she was shocked at this accusation, but finally gave a nervous, half-shrug.

“Yes...” she whispered, “I want him to wake up, more than anything I’ve ever wanted, I want him to be ok, and awake...but there’s this small part of me that keeps saying, what if he’s different, what if he’s changed, that now he’s back with his friends, he won’t need me anymore.”

Remus nodded, listening as Kitty voiced her worst fears, before finally looking over to her, "Tonks and I have both said this already...but the Harry you know, and love, is the same person that's lying in the Hospital bed...you can have secrets from each other and hide things...but its impossible to hide how you feel, and impossible to act anything other than your true self when you're with that person."

She nodded slightly, eyes fixed on a certain point of the floor as she carefully processed this. Eventually she gave a nod and a faint smile.

"You're right..." she said quietly, reminiscent smile widening slightly, "I realised that one day when I with Harry...I'd tell him things that I'd never told anyone before, could never repeat to anyone, that I hadn't even let myself know...and I suddenly wondered why I was doing it...and I realised that I felt like I was myself for the first time in my life, that I could only be like that with Harry."

"It'll be like that again Cathy," he assured her, "more so even, because Harry will be able tell you things now that he couldn't before..."

"It's that what I'm worried about," she said almost sadly, "that he doesn't love me as much as I love him."

"I'm sure he'd say the same Cathy," he said with a slight smile, "everyone thinks that their love must be the strongest in the world, because they can't imagine any one else could feel the same way..."

Kitty smiled slightly, imagining for a moment her and Harry arguing over who loved the other most.

Remus looked cheered at her response and quickly slid off the bench and offered her a hand, "Now, why don't you get a bit of sleep before the antidotes are made, it'll be a long night."

Remus was just the right side of dozing, that point where you're not fully asleep, but already dreaming when he thought he heard the door to the room open. It was so far in the back of his consciousness however he didn't acknowledge the noise, until he felt the right hand

side of the bed sink slightly, as if someone was sitting on it. He struggled back into wakefulness, feeling heavily disorientated and taking some time to even open his eyes. He was a very heavy sleeper usually but wasn't getting enough sleep these days to be disturbed when he finally did settle down.

"Don't wake up on my account," whispered a voice and Remus frowned in his doze.

Finally pulling his eyes open, he managed to focus on a hazy form in front of him. It had blue hair.

"Tonks..." he mumbled, eyes falling shut as he attempted to blink them into operation.

"Wotcher sleepy," she said in a whispered voice full of humour.

"Was'time?" he asked, stretching his legs out and trying to bring her face into focus.

"Eight low," she said, still in a quiet voice as if she was trying not to wake him.

"Is everything ok?" he asked, finally getting her in focus and noting she still look ill, "how you feeling?"

"Everything's fine," she soothed, pushing her hair behind her ears, "I'm ok, a little tired, I went back to the Ministry today."

"You're not supposed to be working for another week," he admonished her, sitting up slightly and noting she did in fact look exhausted.

"Sick of being lazy," she smiled, before giving a yawn, "room for another?"

Wordlessly he shuffled along the small bed slightly and she lay down next to him, stretching out and lying with her back against his chest.

Feeling slightly unsure, Remus wrapped an arm around her and when she didn't do anything worrying he lay his head back on the pillow and closed his eyes wearily. She gave a contented sigh, snuggling against him more and untensing her muscles. Remus smiled to himself at the new feeling.

"Are you tired?" he asked her in a low voice, eyes still closed.

"Mmm," she replied, placing her arm on top of his, which was curled around her waist now, half preventing her from falling off the edge of the tiny bed.

"What was your day like?" he asked.

"Boring," she murmured, sounding half asleep already, "they had me filling out forms and stuff..."

"I don't think you should be working yet," he said, studying in detail her hair, which on closer inspection was a variety of shades of blue.

"Maybe not, but I feel useless otherwise," she replied, lacing her fingers into his, "how's Harry and Cathy?"

"Madam Pomfrey's trying out another of the antidotes at the moment," he said after a moment, "I don't know...it might take a while she reckons."

"Well, at least we know what it is now," replied Tonks, sounding relieved, "I can't believe we never checked his records..."

"We never thought they'd be able to find something like that," he told her comfortingly, "but it seems like once again we've got Cathy to thank for Harry's life."

"She's been so good considering," agreed Tonks, giving a muffled yawn, "how has she been today?"

“Once she calmed down she was fine, she surprised me by talking to me about Harry, and her worries about him waking up,” he replied, before giving a sigh, “she won’t sleep though, she’s been drawing again, did a rather fetching one of Harry that I had to really persuade her to show me. She’s got an incredible talent.”

“Mmm,” she replied, “we’ll have to do something about that...Do you think this antidote will work?”

“I hope so,” he said heavily, “I was beginning to get really worried...Madam Pomfrey seemed to be at a loss this past week - I think she’s happier now she got some direction. It’d be better if Cathy had told us more about what happened.”

“I don’t think she wanted too,” she said sleepily, snuggling against him more, “would you? You know what those people are like to magical people, imagine to her...”

Remus tightened his grip around her waist and thought about what she said. He remembered the reports he’d read the first time round, the sheaves of notes Tonks left lying about, that Moody and Kingsley bought to the house, some of the things in them made your blood run cold.

“Don’t you think it’s odd,” he said finally in a hesitant voice, “that she was hardly injured at all, whereas Harry...well.”

“Mmm,” replied Tonks in a far-off voice, obviously teetering on the edge of sleep, “maybe she hid...”

“We never found out how they got away...” he mused, almost to himself now, “from all those Death Eaters...”

Remus thought about this some more and before long he heard the sound of Tonks breathing become more steady and regular. She was obviously asleep and he smiled to himself, closing his eyes and burying his face in her hair.

Things between them seemed to be progressing relatively easily and naturally he thought to himself, he had been so worried about it when he thought about that night he first kissed her. She was so much younger than him and seemed so different he had thought it wouldn't work at all, but the Tonks he knew and the Tonks everyone else seemed to see were completely different he'd come to realise.

He let himself dwell for a few minutes later before telling his brain to be quiet and let him sleep, he was so exhausted and it was all too easy just to close his eyes and drift off...

What seemed like a second later he was jerked awake by a knocking on the door. Dozily pulling his eyes open and feeling confused for a moment by the wall of blue he was greeted by, he stretched out slightly, realising Tonks was still lying next to him, fast asleep. He looked down at her vaguely before looking out the window, it was pitch black.

The knocking at the door began again and he looked at it blankly for a few seconds.

"Yes?" he called out, pausing to yawn and sit up straighter, trying to balance Tonks on the sofa.

"Remus," said Charlie breathlessly, bursting through the door to Remus' surprise, "I've got-

He broke off mid-sentence as he caught sight of Tonks on the bed, whom he stared at for a few moments before looking up to Remus who inwardly cringed. Without saying anything, Charlie retreated back through the door, pulling it closed with a snap. Remus hastily tried to get off the bed without disturbing Tonks, practically vaulting over her and limping across to the door, the sleep had left his whole right side numb.

When he got out onto the landing he saw Charlie standing with his back to him, looking up at one of the many family portraits this floor held. Remus noticed the back of his neck was red, but also that his



fists were clenched at his side. He decided to play this as cool as possible.

“What did you want Charlie?” he asked.

Charlie whirled round and stared at Remus for a few moments, he was quite surprised to see how angry he was, but after a few moments of staring him dead in the eye he didn't say anything.

“Charlie?” he asked, suddenly wondering if he was going to hit him, though he couldn't see any reason why.

“Madam Pomfrey just sent a message for you,” he said suddenly, his voice shaking with some emotion, “I think she might want you to go to Hogwarts.”

“Really?” he exclaimed, forgetting all about the awkward situation, “Did she say why, is Harry ok?”

“I don't know, the message came through on the fire,” he said, handing him a parchment slip.

Remus beamed and clutched the paper tightly, turning back towards the room as if in a dream – Harry could be awake, he just knew he was, it was almost too good to be true. Cathy would be so happy.

“She's probably asked for Tonks as well,” said Charlie sharply, just as he was walking through the door, “you might want to wake her up.”

Remus paused, wondering what he should say to this, whether he should talk to Charlie about this now or get ready to go to Hogwarts. However the bitterness in his voice made Remus finally turn around and looked at the man steadily.

“I'll do that,” he said finally in measured tones, “she's been waiting for this.”

He gave look that was half way between a smirk and a frown and Remus gave a nod, wanting, and ready, to go. Charlie looked like he

was fighting his conscious to say something and Remus turned away, if Harry really was awake then he had more important places than standing here with Charlie discussing their love lives.

“She’s too young for you,” he said in a hard voice just as he was walking through the door.

He sighed and turned around, giving Charlie a level look.

“It’s not really got anything to do with you, has it?” he asked calmly.

He looked outraged and his knuckles were now white with the pressure of his clenched fists and he attempted to stare Remus down.

“Look Charlie, can I ask you not to say anything?”

“Why, don’t want anyone to find out about your sordid little love affair?”

Even Remus was slightly taken aback by this, frowning at him slightly.

“No, because Tonks has only just come out of hospital and I don’t think she needs anymore stress, do you?” He asked in measured tones.

Charlie had to decency to look slightly ashamed and Remus caught the glance he sent through the doorway to Tonks, who was still deeply asleep. He then looked over to Remus, staring him dead in the eye before he quite unexpectedly spun on his heel, striding down the corridor and towards the stairs. Remus gave another sigh, closing his eyes wearily and he walked back into the room.

He looked down at the letter, quickly opening it, almost worried about what it would say, but he consoled himself in the fact that if it was bad news, she’d hardly write to tell him.

To Mr Lupin,

The new course of potions administered today has worked and Harry's showing signs of coming round, you are welcome to come when you can.

Madam P. Pomfrey.

Remus grinned widely and immediately knelt down beside Tonks. He watched her sleeping for a moment, she looked so calm and peaceful, not like the exhausted face he was used to seeing when she was awake. After a few moments he gave a sad smile and reached out, shaking her shoulder slightly.

She made a noise, shifting on the seat slightly before falling silent again, still deeply asleep.

"Tonks?" he said, shaking her shoulder again, "wake up."

"Mmm," she mumbled, followed by an incoherent sentence that sounded suspiciously like, "get tha dog outta ma car..."

He smiled slightly but didn't allow himself to enjoy watching her mumble her way into consciousness.

"Tonks!"

"Wha?" she asked vaguely, pulling her eyes open and looking at him for a few moments before finally giving a smile of recognition, "Morning."

She gave a wide yawn.

"It's not morning yet," he said with a grin, "Madam Pomfrey's sent for us, I think Harry's awake."

"Really?" she asked, sitting bolt upright, scaring him slightly, "is he ok?"

"I don't know yet, I suppose it's a bit of a stupid question asking if you want to come with me?"

“Yes,” she laughed, swinging her legs over the bed and rubbing her face and trying to blink away her sleep.

Remus moved around the room, putting together a bag to stay the night at Hogwarts and was pulling his travelling cloak from the chair by his desk when Tonks wandered over, already ready to go.

“The beauty of sleeping in your clothes,” she told him, giving an exhausted yawn

“Are you up to apparating to Hogsmeade or do you want to Floo it to Dumbledore’s office?” he asked worriedly, noticing how unsteady she looked on her feet.

She looked as if she were about to reply that she was fine apparating, but seemed to think better of it and instead gave him a slight shrug and an embarrassed smile.

“Floo would be nice,” she suggested and Remus grinned.

“Right, let’s go,” he nodded, not making a big thing of it and heading towards the door.

They went downstairs, passing the empty hole where the portrait of Mrs Black had once been, although Remus had come hate that portrait, it was eerie that it was so quiet in the hallway now – everyone had grown used to tiptoeing down there now.

When they entered the kitchen to use the largest fire, Remus saw Charlie and Bill sitting at the table. Charlie was glaring at the glass in front of him whereas Bill merely nodded over to Remus, small smile on his face. Tonks gave another yawn.

“Alright guys?” she asked vaguely, not really interested in the answer as she searched her bag for something.

“Sleep well?” asked Charlie challengingly.

“First decent nights sleep in a while,” she replied, unaware of the look he’d given her or the tone.

Bill and Remus shared a worried look.

“Yeah, I bet.”

She looked across to him, puzzled for a moment before locating whatever she was searching for, a leather pouch of floo powder. Without saying anything and after giving Remus a look, she pulled out a handful of powder and handed the pouch to him.

“See you later guys,” she said in a quiet voice, before stepping into the fire.

Remus couldn’t decide whether to say anything or not but was saved having to think of something when Bill spoke up.

“Oh grow up,” he muttered, almost inaudibly to Remus, who saw Charlie look up to him swiftly.

If looks could kill...

“Best tell Molly if Harry really is awake,” said Remus, looking Charlie dead in the eye, before stepping into the flames. Harry was waking up.

She’d been waiting for this moment for so long, hoping, praying, waiting like her life depended on it, but now it actually was...she couldn’t cope.

Remus and Tonks had woken her up, the Weasley’s were apparently on their way, an immeasurable amount of people seemed to be filling the Hospital Wing, silently waiting as the Matron fluttered backwards and forwards across Harry. They kept a respectful distance, watching avidly as she could do nothing but stand where she’d leapt from her bed, staring at the scene unfolding. Her entire life was going to be

decided on how Harry acted towards her now, and deep down she didn't really know how that would be.

She didn't even know the Harry that was lying in that bed. She knew her Harry, the Harry who went to her old school, who ate McDonalds, who hated horror movies, got angry at her for drinking too much, made fun of her accent...This Harry, the wizard, someone who flew on a broomstick for fun, someone who could do anything with magic, could breathe underwater...who was he?

Maybe Hermione was right, maybe she'd been right all along...he was going to wake up long enough to tell everyone he'd had his taste of her world, that she wasn't needed anymore...Then she'd be gone, back to living that life...

She didn't want that to happen, but almost equally, she was afraid that Harry would wake up and she'd realise she didn't want him anymore. What if he was too different? What if...she gulped querulously now...what if she didn't love him anymore?

The silence of the Hospital Wing was now broken by the sound of murmuring, something was happening! She began to tremble, so indecisive was she over what to do - she wanted to push through the throng of people and sit by his side, she wanted to run away to safety. Her hands were shaking, her heart was pumping as if she'd run miles, her breath was coming out in trembling gasps.

"Harry?" asked a voice in the silence, "Can you hear me Harry?"

Kitty couldn't take it any more, she found the feet that had been stuck to the floor before jumping into action without any command from her brain. They were taking her away, bare soles slapping down on cold stone as they led the way, mind somewhere else. She didn't know how long she'd been running for, but she soon became aware that her prickling, sweating skin was raised in goosebumps against the cool nights air and her lungs were burning and she stumbled to a halt.

She looked around herself desperately, she was at the edge of the great black lake where it met the forest she'd been forbidden from entering. She walked with shaking legs over to one tree, whose

finger-like branches were dipped into the water and dropped into a heap at the base of the trunk. She drew her knees up to her chin and gazed out across the water, feeling shielded by the mighty tree from everything.

"I can't find her anywhere," said Tonks worriedly as she met Remus at the doorway to the Hospital Wing some twenty minutes later.

"I've checked the Library, asked most of the paintings, no ones seen her," he said, looking into the room and biting his lip.

"She's not on the steps where she usually is," she replied, "where could she be Remus? You don't think she's run away again do you?"

"No, I think she must just be scared..." he said quietly, moving out of the doorway so they could talk more privately.

"But why? She's been waiting so long for this?" Tonks whispered.

"Perhaps she's worried about what to say, how to act..." he replied, "she's only ever known the person Harry wanted her to see - now she's got to face who he really is."

Tonks gave a sigh and ran a hand through her hair, "We've got to find her Remus."

"Let's check the grounds," he suggested, "she tends to head outside doesn't she? I just hope she hasn't decided to try the forest again."

"She wouldn't, not now," Tonks told him as they walked slowly towards the Entrance Hall, hoping she was right.

She hadn't realised how tiring it would be just to walk around. She'd been out of hospital a few days now, but the utter weariness seemed to be fixed within her bones now and the thought of walking even down the steps filled her with fatigue. However, she put on a brave face and slowly followed Remus - she thought she'd been doing a pretty good acting job until Remus slipped a hand around her waist and steadied and supported her.

“I’m ok really,” she told him stubbornly.

“You don’t need to pretend with me,” he told her simply.

She gave a grin, feeling inexplicably touched at this - he was right, she didn’t need to lie with him, and this made her happier than she thought she could put into words.

They reached the steps, walking down them slowly and surveying the grounds. She could be anywhere, Cathy had an amazing knack for disappearing if she wanted to.

They were finally, inexplicably drawn towards the lake, knowing that Kitty had a certain fascination for it, having once gone for a ‘swim’ in the inky black waters.

“Look, there she is,” whispered Tonks suddenly, pointing to a huddled shape beneath a weeping willow.

“Maybe you should go over?” he suggested, allowing her to stand on her own now.

She nodded and began to edge closer to the girl, who seemed completely oblivious to her presence. Tonks gulped worriedly, Kitty had her knees drawn up tight to her chest and had her chin balanced on her folded arms, eyes glittering in the darkness.

“Wotcher Cathy,” she said softly, coming to a halt a few metres away from her.

Kitty inclined her head slightly but made no sound and after a few moments Tonks moved closer.

“What are you doing out here?” she asked, lowering herself heavily to the floor.

Kitty didn’t reply, shaking her head silently and Tonks watched her carefully. She’d never seen her like this and was slightly worried, had something else happened she wasn’t aware of?



“What’s wrong Cathy?” she asked anxiously, laying a hand on the girls shoulder.

Again she shook her head, but then gave a small sniff that instantly told Tonks what was wrong - she was crying. She was well aware of the fact that through everything that had happened since she’d met the girl, she’d never seen a single tear shed and realised this must have been a big thing.

“Oh come here sweetie,” she said, pulling the girl into a hug.

Instead of lashing out or shrugging her off as she’d expected, Kitty gave a small, choked sob and wrapped her arms around Tonks tightly.

“Hush,” she murmured, smoothing down her hair, “what’s wrong?”

Kitty merely shook her head again, burying it into Tonks’ shoulder as she began to cry. She waited patiently, looking over the girls shoulder to see Remus waiting, watching them worriedly. She tried to convey what was happening with a look, before turning her attention back to the girl.

“What’s got you so upset?” asked Tonks, “Cathy? What’s wrong?”

“I’m scared Tonks,” she finally whispered in a tortured voice.

“What of?”

She gave another sniff, “Of what’s going to happen.”

“With you?” she guessed.

“Both of us.”

“I don’t know exactly Cathy, but I promise you I’ll do everything I can to help you,” she promised firmly, “Remus too. We won’t let anything happen to you that you don’t want, ok?”

Kitty nodded her head heavily and drew back from Tonks' hug, rubbing the tears away with quick swipes.

"What if you can't help?" she asked quietly.

"How do you mean?"

"What if what's happening to me can't be fixed?"

"I don't quite follow you," said Tonks, gazing at the girl in confusion.

"I mean, what if Harry doesn't like me anymore, now he has his friends again..." she asked painfully, sounding as if she was voicing her deepest fears, "before all this happened we'd had a few rocky days, arguing and everything...what if...what if I've been stupid to think it'd be like it was..."

"Don't think like that Cathy," cautioned Tonks, sounding worried.

"I can't help it. All this time I've been praying for him to be ok, but I don't even know the person who's in that place," she said, tears creeping back into her voice, "he's not going to be the same is he?"

"You might not have known the details of Harry's life Cathy, but you knew him didn't you?" said Tonks, understanding instantly everything the girl feared, "deep down you knew Harry, that's not going to have changed."

Kitty nodded mutely, wiping her eyes again furiously.

"But it's the details that make a person, isn't it?" she said desperately, "And Harry has a whole other life here, one that I can't understand, can't be part of."

"That's not true," she told her firmly, "you can be just as big a part of his life now than ever - more so, you've saved his life! And I know everything must be so hard for you to understand at the moment - it's

hard for some of the kids coming to this school to get used to magic! But in time, it won't seem strange at all..."

"I doubt that," she replied, giving a weak, watery laugh, "paintings talk back to you and ghosts pop through the walls. And there's a giant octopus in the lake, isn't there?"

"I was hoping you wouldn't find out about that," said Tonks ruefully.

"It's a squid actually," came Remus' voice and they both looked up to see him dropping down into the grass.

"Oh, that's ok then," said Kitty in a hollow voice, "perfectly normal."

"I don't think that word will ever apply to us, eh Remus?" asked Tonks, shooting him a grin.

Kitty looked up to the castle, lights gleaming in the dark, glittering off the lake - it really was enchanting she thought. Too bad she knew what it was really like.

"Is..." she began to ask anxiously, stalling for a few moments, "is he awake..?"

"I don't know," Tonks told her quietly, "he was still out when we left to find you..."

Kitty gave a sniff, still staring at the castle.

"Do you want to go up?" Remus asked her.

"Yes," she whispered querulously, "and no..."

"You can see him on your own if you like," suggested Tonks, "that way you can be alone - how does that sound?"

Kitty thought about this for a moment.

“Terrifying,” she replied.

Tonks and Remus gave a small chuckle.

“But you know what they say right?” asked Kitty, resolution in her voice, “Do one thing every day that scares you...”

“Let’s go then,” said Tonks happily.

They all stood up and silently headed towards the castle. Remus was helping Tonks, who was looking pale faced and exhausted now and Kitty walked alongside him, staring at the floor as she tried to calm down her madly hammering heart. This was it, the moment she’d been hoping for, praying for, dreading...

Now they were entering the entrance hall, the corridors cool compared to the summers day outside and she stared at the flagstone floor in a kind of daze, half-excited, half-terrified.

Then they were at the door to the hospital wing and she paused momentarily before pushing it open, she couldn’t put it off any longer, here was her fate, waiting for her...

Harry’s bed had a silent audience of people surrounding it and as the three approached they could hear the Matron talking loudly, words echoing around the room.

“Harry?” she asked clearly, “Harry? Can you hear me?”

Kitty sidestepped her way to the front, moving past black-robed witches and wizards as she finally got a glimpse of Harry’s bed. She felt like her heart was in her throat now, the Matron was leaning over the bed and Harry’s head was turning towards her groggily.

Kitty let out a noise half-way between an exclamation of laughter and shock, raising a shaking hand to her mouth as she stared at his face, yellow and waxen, but twisting into a grimace of pain. Someone next to her took a deep shuddering breath, as if they were trying to hold

back the tears, and she glanced to her side to see Hermione and Ron, both staring avidly at the bed.

“Harry? You’re at Hogwarts Harry, can you hear me?”

She couldn’t even think now, her mind seemed to have gone blank. It was as if everything she could see and hear and feel, wasn’t even real. It was too much to deal with. She aware in some way that tears were sliding down her face silently and that she was shaking.

“Where’s ssshe?” came a raspy voice suddenly in the silence.

It took her a second realise it had come from Harry and that a murmur had chased around the assembled waiting.

“Harry?” asked the Matron again, before casting a quick spell.

“Kitty...” he whispered, so quietly she could hardly hear it, “Kitty?”

Her heart began to hammer against her chest and she stared at his lips, daring him to say again, please let it not be her imagination...

“Harry, how do you feel?” she replied loudly, “Where does it hurt?”

Kitty felt herself step forward slightly, as if in a dream.

“Where’s she?” he asked a little louder this time, “Where’s...Kitty?”

She wanted to say something, but she felt as if her throat was being squeezed tightly, as if speaking would hurt too much.

“Is she...” he began painfully, sounding almost panicked, “is she...”

She could hear it in his voice, he thought she was dead, he thought she hadn’t made it.

“Is she...”

“Harry,” Kitty whispered, stepping forward again, “I’m here...”

At the sound of her voice he turned to look at her, and Kitty got a fleeting glimpse of dull, murky green eyes before her own eyes went blurry with tears. Before she really knew what she was doing, she was striding towards him, unable to take it any longer. She was sobbing loudly, whatever veil of disbelief that had been holding back the emotion suddenly disappearing. She stood next to him, throwing her arms around him as she buried her face into the pillow next to his head.

“You’re ok,” she sobbed after a shuddering breath, “you’re ok...oh my God...you’re ok...”

“Kitty,” he whispered, wrapping his own arms around her weakly, “How...You...”

She held him even closer, a strange, powerful new emotion coursing through her veins. She’d already told him she loved him, but this seemed to be more than that - deeper, stronger. She wanted him to tell him that, about how she felt, about the past two weeks, about everything she’d learned. She wanted to tell him what she’d done in the graveyard, how Tom Riddle was gone, how they’d escaped, what she’d done...But she couldn’t seem to say anything, her throat was too tight and her thoughts too jumbled to articulate what she knew she should say.

“Kitty...I’m sorry...”

There didn’t seem to be anything else he could say either and she didn’t know what else to do but cry and cling on to him, feeling as if she been granted a second chance, that she’d been given back what she’d lost.

Remus stood close to Tonks, steadying arm around her waist as they, like everyone else in the Hospital Wing, watched Harry and Kitty silently. He didn’t think he’d ever seen two people more unaware of their surroundings, more completely oblivious to the world, more ecstatic yet exhausted than Harry and Kitty. It was a strange moment he reflected sometime later, no one had spoken, even the Matron had just stood back and watched them.

Perhaps, he wondered vaguely, no one knew what to say, or just perhaps, they wanted to enjoy someone's perfect moment.

Ron and Hermione, he realised, was watching the pair in gobsmacked silence, mouths hanging slightly open, telling shade of guilt creeping up their cheeks and he glanced across to Tonks to see if she'd noticed. However, she was also staring at the two, pale faced, but a small telling-smile on her lips. She more than anyone had been waiting for this, he thought to himself, she'd always been on Kitty's side. Tonks looked across to him and they swapped a brief smile that said it all, before he looked back to the pair.

They were clinging onto each other in desperate silence, like a ship wrecked person who had finally found another survivor in their fathomless sea of isolation. The expression on Harry's face was one he'd seen once, a long time ago, mirrored on the face of James during the height of the war. And in that moment he understood what Kitty had silently been telling them all since she'd arrived, what he knew but they had all failed to grasp since Harry disappeared when they question why he would do something like this.

They were in love. And nothing in the world could ever change that fact.

Kitty had her eyes squeezed tight shut, almost thinking that if she opened them she might wake up, that all this was just some beautiful dream. All she wanted to do was stay there forever, clinging onto Harry, just taking in his presence, the fact he was awake.

He was back with her.

"I missed you Harry," she whispered quietly, "so much..."

"Me too...I thought, I thought...you were dead..." he rasped and she drew back slightly so she could study his face.

“Tough as old boots, me,” she managed to choke out, carefully brushing his hair away from his eyes, “you’re not that...I-lucky...”

He gave a sudden grimace of pain and his fingers clench convulsively for a moment. She gave a frightened start, patting the bedclothes and furiously wiping her tears away.

“How do you feel?” she tried to say.

He merely shook his head wordlessly, expression of his face being answer enough.

“How...long?” he asked, dry, raw voice sounding weak and pitiful.

“Nearly two weeks?” she said, giving a weak smile despite her tears, “You scared the shit out of me, you bastard.”

He gave another grimace of pain and she took in his waxy, yellow skin and dull eyes with a horrible sinking feeling in her stomach. He wasn’t better yet. She placed a hand on either side of his face, studying him even closer, aware that his murky green eyes were following her every movement.

For some reason it felt almost eerie to see.

“What...happened?” he asked, voice sounding dry and raw.

She looked him for a long second, becoming more aware that people were all around them, watching and listening.

“Not important right now,” she whispered, smoothing the hair off his forehead for a moment.

She was aware that her feelings at the moment were difficult to contain, perhaps even more so because she knew deep down that things would soon have to be said, decisions made, stories told that wouldn’t be fed by this euphoria of him awakening. She knew a time would come when the anger and frustration, the hurt and guilt would



come bursting out, and she didn't know if they were strong enough to deal with it, that it could be made better.

"You're safe," she managed to croak out as her vision blurred with tears, "that's all that matters right now..."

And she began to cry, releasing everything she'd felt since that terrible night, feeling as if the breath she'd been holding for weeks was suddenly over.

AN/ I'm sorry for the shockingly long wait for the next chapter! In this time I have got my degree and been digging in Portugal in a Neanderthal cave for the entire World Cup! Had the good fortune to watch us being knocked out by the Portuguese, d'oh! (Well done France btw!)

Never mind! Yay Harry's finally awake! I hope you liked this chapter and don't study my scrappy knowledge of 'muggle' medicine too much, I only watch it on TV and don't claim knowledge, lol.

What do you think?

## Chapter Twenty Six

I Don't Hate You For This...

But...

I Don't Love You For This Either...

The celebratory atmosphere of Harry's awakening lasted deep into the night, despite him falling asleep not long after waking up. Kitty found this incredible, as he'd been asleep for nearly two weeks solid, but was soon informed that the potions and antidotes had certain side effects, drowsiness being paramount.

Kitty didn't mind him sleeping now though, because at least she'd seen him awake, heard his voice again, albeit raw and harsh, and at least she knew he'd wake up again soon. An impromptu party had blossomed in the far reaches of the Hospital Wing as drinks and platters of food appeared suspiciously quickly and everyone relaxed from the tensions of the past few weeks. Even the Matron, usually a demon for quiet and rules was turning a blind eye to the festivities and Kitty was sure she caught her slipping a scotch egg into her mouth when no one was looking.

She grinned happily to herself, savouring the almost unreal feeling of being happy again. It was the sort of happiness that was born out of sheer relief, which never lasted for long, but made you soar on wings in the mean time. The feeling was increased even more so as she surreptitiously watched Remus and Tonks talking together, pretending to be nothing more than friends as they grinned, laughed and had sometimes lowered conversations. She sipped at the bottle that had been pressed into her hand by Tonks, savouring the warm feeling in left in her belly, a quick inspection of the label proclaimed it to be 'butterbeer', established 1328.

Just as she was musing what the ingredients must have been in the drink, she felt a presence in front of her and looked up quickly, only to find a small, jovial looking man she'd met some time ago. If she hadn't already been introduced to him, she could have guessed he

was the head of the Weasley clan by his slightly weary, henpecked air and remaining ginger hair.

“Hello Cathy,” he said as they came to a halt, “I’m Arthur Weasley.”

“Yes, I remember,” she said, before taking a sip of her drink, unsure what he wanted with her.

“But of course! I’ve forgotten all about our last meeting, what with everything that’s happened!” he said genially, not phased by her suspicious look, “I just thought you might like an update on what’s happening with your wonderful drawings of the Death Eaters?”

“Oh,” she said in surprise, sitting up straighter now, “of course. What’s the news?”

“Well, most of them are inmates from Azkaban, that’s our Wizarding prison, so it’s not really surprising they were involved in all this,” he began, sitting down next to her and balancing a plate of mini pasties on his lap, “but there’s definitely a few new names there too. We’ve got Aurors trailing most of them, monitoring their actions and such, some of them I have to say, are acting very suspiciously already. I think you’re drawings and testimony, with all the evidence we’ll collect could put away most of those people you met!”

“That’s...that’s fantastic,” she said genuinely, surprised at the momentary writhe of guilt in her stomach at the thought of being an informer.

“Isn’t it?” he enthused, give a contented sigh, “There’s no telling what these people are capable of, and the thought of putting them away before they’ve got the chance? Well! Imagine the lives you’ve saved!”

Kitty didn’t know what to say to this so merely settled for an embarrassed smile at her knees.

“Glad I could help,” she mumbled and he gave a chuckle.

“Help?” he laughed, causing a mini pasty to teeter on the edge of his plate, “Capturing dangerous criminals, and saving Harry’s life! Twice! Well, I’d say you’ve been more than a little help!”

Again she was speechless and gave a self-depreciating shrug, unused to both the praise and the thought of someone magical other than Harry, Tonks and Remus wanting to talk to her. Arthur Weasley merely chuckled for a few moments longer, before taking a sip of his own butterbeer as Kitty endured a silence she longed to be filled.

“Well Cathy, I know the past few weeks have been hard on you,” he said, and she looked across to him with barely concealed surprise - now she gets sympathy?

“I know what it’s like for muggles to be suddenly introduced into the magical world, it’s part of my job...and I must say you’ve coped a lot better than many people...” Arthur told her encouragingly, “you’ve really taken things in your stride and the way you worked out what was wrong with Harry? Well, that shows real determination.”

“I - thanks,” she mumbled, waiting for the ‘but’.

“And I know everyone hasn’t exactly been on their best behaviour,” he said, looking suddenly severe. Kitty guessed he’d somehow found out about her arguments with Hermione and Ron, “If I’m honest, everyone was a bit taken aback at Harry leaving like he did, I think maybe you’ve had the brunt of their feelings.”

Kitty stared at him incredulously, she’d thought they didn’t like her because of where she came from and how she spoke, not least because she was a ‘muggle’ and a particularly troublesome one at that - but the idea that people didn’t like her because of Harry was news to her.

“It’s not fair, I know,” he said quickly, misinterpreting her expression, “we’re just happy he’s back, and that you both won’t hurt any more seriously - I still can’t quite believe you both made it out of there.”

Kitty shifted uncomfortably, the man had a funny idea of the definition of seriously hurt, if he thought Harry didn't apply to this category.

"Well," he said expansively, standing up once more, "I'm sure you've got plenty to talk to Harry about now eh? I'm going to see if any of those delicious cocktail sausages are left."

"Ok...er bye," she said awkwardly.

Arthur milled off in the direction of the food and Kitty stared after him, not quite sure what to make of it all - she was sure somewhere in there and unspoken apology lingered.

"Cathy!" called a voice, and she turned to see Tonks beckoning her over to her and Remus.

She got up and walked over to see them both smiling at her.

"Making friends?" asked Remus innocently.

"I think so," she said, dropping into a seat, "not sure."

"Everyone's very impressed with what you did Cathy," Tonks said, looking almost smug about it, "I think you'll find that you may not have so much trouble with everyone from now on."

"Perhaps not everyone I'm guessing," she said with a smirk, gaze skittering over to the Weasley siblings and Hermione, who had formed their own private party, "but I'll settle with the voting majority."

"Well enjoy it, that's all I'm saying, you deserve a bit of recognition," she laughed, raising her bottle to Kitty, "a toast! To the bee's knees! Toast of the town! Harry's personal Guardian Angel!"

"Harry's personal Guardian Angel!" chimed in Remus as their bottles clinked.

Kitty gave a snort of laughter as they raised their bottles to drink, "I think Harry would have something to say about that!"

But she drank to the toast anyway, heart soaring, it had taken a while, but she was finally starting to feel...Happy.

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Harry awoke with a start, limbs jerking as he gave a grimace of pain at his sore stomach. It took a moment of frantic looking around for him to realise that he was in the Hospital Wing, familiar smell being the most obvious clue. He relaxed slightly and tried to calm his madly beating heart, he'd had the most vivid nightmare; red eyes, a graveyard, Kitty's scream dying in his ear...

It was memory, not a nightmare and he'd clenched at the bed sheet until his knuckles were white at this thought. Grimacing at the pain it caused, he rolled over onto his side to look around him, but was greeted by the high white curtains that separated the beds. He was almost surprised at how upset this made him feel, because he knew that right at the moment there was only one thing he wanted to see, needed...

"Kitty?" he whispered, barely audibly, already knowing that she'd be deeply asleep and wouldn't hear him.

He'd almost become used to their night time routine, him waking up from a nightmare, and her being there, usually ready and waiting, even if it was just to sit and keep him company in silence.

It seemed like such a small thing really.

He sighed and rolled onto his back once more. Even if she was awake he didn't know if Kitty would want to come to him. There's was so much that needed to be said, and as out of it as he felt, he knew that there was going to be plenty for them to talk about.

"Harry?"

The voice, barely above a murmur, caused him to give a jerk of shock and he look off to his side to see Kitty sliding around the curtain with

a worried look on her face. He was taken aback by her appearance for a moment, she was wearing a hospital gown that went down to her ankles and her braids were hanging down over her face, she looked so young and scared...

“Are you ok?” she whispered, coming over to the side of his bed, “do you need the nurse?”

“No...” he croaked out, “I just...”

He trailed off, not exactly sure what he wanted to say anymore.

He couldn't quite see her expression in the dark but a moment later he heard her pulling up a chair to the side of his bed.

“Another nightmare?” she asked simply, not even waiting for his answer, “At least I can see why you kept having them now.”

She sounded casual, as if talking about nothing more than the weather. After a moment she leant forward and felt his forehead with the back of her hand.

“You're burning up too, guess that antidote must be working,” she said, sounding a little unsure.

“Antidote?” he asked, grimacing at how sore his throat was.

“You were poisoned apparently,” she said, still talking in a strange, offhanded way, “that's why you've been out of it or so long...we only figured out yesterday. Matron lady reckons it'll be a few more days until you're throat and stomach's healed properly.”

“Oh...”

They lapsed into silence for a moment and Harry tried to get the measure of Kitty's emotions - she was always too good at hiding them for him, she could always tell what he was thinking, but to him, sometimes Kitty's was a closed book. It was no better at the moment,

she sounded fine, but usually that meant she was lying though her teeth.

“Kitty...are you...ok?” he asked, finding the thought painful to continue, “did They...hurt you?”

She gave a slight sigh he couldn't interpret, but leaned forward and picked up his hand.

“Didn't have a scratch on me,” she replied, giving his hand a comforting squeeze, “besides you know me, rubber bones - sometimes.”

Harry let out the shaky breath he didn't know he'd been holding, at least she wasn't hurt, his worst nightmare hadn't come true. He didn't know how he could have coped if he'd woken up here and found that she had been hurt, or worse. Then the question he wanted to know almost as much as if she'd been hurt.

“How did we...”

“Escape?” she cut in, before giving another slight, uncharacteristic laugh, “You remember Ian's gun?”

Her voice was hovering on the edge of hearing as he said this and he gave a start, remembering that just yesterday, it seemed, he'd found that in her bag and argued about it.

“Well...I sorted things out,” she continued, “He's dead.”

Harry stared at her blankly for a moment, not able to understand what, or who, she was talking about. He tried to prop himself onto his elbows but quickly gave up at the stab of pain in his sides as he frowned at her shadowy shape.

“Who?” he began, before shaking his head, “What do you...do you mean?”



“Him. Tom Riddle, Voldemort?” she said, fierce edge to her voice, “I told you once that I’d kill him if he touched you, and he did.”

Harry merely stared at her, memory of Voldemort’s words dying in his ears as the blackness overtook him, lying in that wet grass on the grave of Riddle Senior. He gave a shudder and looked back over to Kitty.

“He’s not dead.”

“What?” she demanded quite suddenly and loudly, “Yes he is, I saw it.”

“He’s not,” was all he could reply

“How do you know?” she demanded angrily.

“I just know,” he stated.

“Harry-” she started, before breaking off suddenly and leaning towards him, whispering in a harsh voice in his ear, “He’s dead Harry...I pumped six bullets into his chest...he’s dead, I saw it happen, ok?”

The fact that she was wrong, that he knew that Voldemort still out there and that they still both had to come to terms with that, was more than he thought he could take. The notion that Kitty had turned the gun on the most evil Dark Lord in a century didn’t even enter his mind. Finally, he unstuck his raw throat to speak to her, aware she was trembling now in her thin robe.

“He’s not dead Kitty,” he told her in a quiet voice, “I’d know if he was.”

In a moment she had sat back in her chair, yanking her hand out of his hand and folding them across her chest.

“What are you, fucking psychic as well now?”

Harry flinched and looked away.

After a moment she leaned forwards and asked, almost hesitantly, "You're not, are you?"

He sighed deeply, "No I'm not...I just have this, sort of...connection...with Him."

"With Riddle?" she asked, torn between fury and horror.

"Yes...only dreams...sometimes thoughts...and my nightmares," he tried to explain, well aware of how this would sound to Kitty, sometimes to him, it sounded mad...

"So..." she began in a shaky voice, before clearing her throat, "So, did you just have an ah, a dream? And you knew he was, still alive?"

"While I was asleep...he was there..." he began, before breaking off a sighing heavily, he didn't want Kitty to know this sort of stuff.

"Harry, you're just being paranoid...Think about it for a minute...How does anyone survive being shot at like that Harry?" she said, as if trying to coax him away from crazy thoughts.

"He's not human," he stated flatly, thinking back to those snakelike eyes, the long, spider-like fingers, that voice, those words, "not anymore..."

There was a long silence and Harry remember the dark of his apparent two week sleep, remembering his two companions - the big black dog that never acknowledged his presence but stayed with him, and that other one, just out of sight. Always just over his shoulder, watching, waiting...

"Oh..."

He looked over to Kitty and in the dim light he could see her slumped shoulders, though not her expression.

“Should’ve known something as simple as a gun couldn’t possibly hurt one of your lot.”

Harry couldn’t help but flinch as if she’d actually struck him with that comment, your lot.

“Just Him,” he croaked quietly, “it’d work if you felt like shooting me.”

Kitty gave a sudden burst of laughter and for a moment Harry didn’t know whether it was one of humour or agreement.

“What?” he asked tentatively.

“Hey, I’ve busted my guts to keep you alive,” she said, voice bubbling with humour, “I’m not about to go blow your brains out! Why’d you say that?”

“Aren’t you angry with me?” he asked, not even wanting to know the answer.

“Of course I am!” she exclaimed, “I’m furious! Can’t you tell?”

“It sometimes difficult,” he said meekly, feeling the bottom dropping out of his stomach.

“Yeah well,” she said and she leaned forward so he caught a little of her expression in a shaft of moonlight, “I’m waiting for you to get you’re voice back so we can have a right slanging match - we’re good at that, right?”

“Yeah...right,” he replied, he vividly recalled their argument back at Donna’s flat - he didn’t think he’d ever shouted so much, felt so drained and hopeless...

“I am...sorry,” Harry tried, already realising how pathetic and weak it sounded.

Sorry I didn't tell you I was a wizard, that a semi-immortal maniac would try and kill us, that you're in a magical castle, that I wasn't what you thought I was, what you wanted me to be. How do you go about saying all of that?

"I know...so am I," she replied, climbing to her feet, "listen, get some sleep, we can talk tomorrow - I've been here long enough to know that the Matron would probably hang me for keeping you up in the middle of the night."

"Ok...bye," he called, but she had already gone around the curtain.

He stared at it, feeling disconsolate, her words were far from comforting.

What do 'I know, so am I' mean anyway? She was sorry, she was sorry for what happened? She wished it hadn't happened? That she'd never met him. He rolled onto his back and stared at the roof, deep in thought, not able to stop Kitty's voice running around in his head.

'I'm furious'.

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Tonks dragged her eyes open the next morning, sense of despair already welling to the surface as if last night's jollity had been a distant dream. As usual two things were running around her mind; money and Remus. He was soon going to be gone for a few days and she was beginning to have a serious goblin problem. She hadn't managed to find the money for this week's instalment, despite her and Remus' best efforts and she was now in hiding whilst she tried to figure out what to do.

And 'in hiding' meant a room at Grimauld Place. She had finally given in to Remus' requests and left her friends house, and in a way it had almost been a move for the better; she no longer had to cope with constant baby screams, a sofa for a bed and the threat of a Shylock visitation.

Luckily, the Ministry had given her a sick leave extension and she was still on half pay, so at least she had some cash. It was the cauldron load left over she was worried about. Just as she was wondering what would happen if the Goblins went to the Ministry to find her, there came a knock at the door. She considered faking sleep, not really feeling like seeing anyone, when she heard Remus say her name softly behind the door.

“Yeah, come on in,” she called out, already sitting up.

Remus entered balancing a tray, giving a slight smile at her mussed up hair. Unconsciously she spent a few moments thought rearranging it into a bubblegum pink bob, so that when he sat down he gave a slight start of surprise.

“Going to have to get used to that,” he said ruefully, as he placed the tray on the bedside table, “how are you feeling?”

“Ok,” she replied, thinking her aching bones didn’t really agree with her, before catching sight of his face, “what’s wrong? What happened?”

“Kingsley has sent some mail you got from the Ministry,” he said grimly, holding up a parchment letter, on top of which was the Gringotts stamp.

“Oh...” she said in a hollow voice, taking it off him with slightly shaking hands.

“It’ll just be a warning according to Bill,” he told her and she nodded blankly. “He tried to talk to the Goblins last night but he didn’t have any luck I’m afraid, so...”

“So I’m screwed, aren’t I?” she demanded, dropping the unopened letter and burying her face into the pillows.

“Don’t say that,” he said frowning, “something’s going to turn up.”

“Like what?” she asked despairingly.

“Well, I really think you ought to tell everyone what’s going-”

“No!” she said, sitting up quickly, “I’m not having them talking about me behind my back! I’ve just got to sit back and think-”

“-Of a way to convince 700 galleons to fall into you lap?” he cut in, eyebrows raised, “Listen Tonks, you’re going to have to decide what’s more important, what people think of you, or whether your legs are still attached to your body. Goblins aren’t messing around when you sign those contracts-”

“I know that!” she snapped back, glaring at him for a moment, “I’m trying everything I can.”

“No you’re not,” he said simply, causing her to turn up the wattage of the glare, “you’re not telling anyone. They’re your friends, they’ll help.”

“Yeah right, like they help you out?” she asked sarcastically, “No one seems particularly bothered about your lack of funds.”

Remus didn’t say anything, treating her to a long silence that made her feel slightly guilty, but not enough to apologise or back down.

“That’s different,” he said finally, “and not relevant. And I know why you’re upset, but having a go at me isn’t going to help, we need to think of a way to get this weeks money.”

“I’m trying!” she said, only slightly pacified, “I’ve tried every way I can think of to make more money! Extra shifts at the Ministry, working at Azkaban, selling stuff!”

“And all that’s done is put you in Hospital,” he said gently, turning back to her now, “let’s face it, you can’t physically earn enough money to pay it back now.”

Tonks deflated slightly, she’d known this for some time, as week on week the debt crept up, but somehow she’d always thought there

would be a way. That with her skills and her training she could make it all back.

“So what can I do?” she asked dully, throwing her arms up.

He gave a moments thought and Tonks watched him, he seemed to be steeling himself.

“What if...” he began slowly, “what if there was a way for you to lay your hands on this weeks payment?”

“Depends on what you mean by ‘lay your hands on’” she asked suspiciously.

“Well,” he said, before looking over to her with a closed expression on his face, “I’ve thought of a way we could do it. Just this time, 100 galleons, what do you say?”

“Hang on a minute, how are you suddenly able to get 100 galleons?” she asked him, almost daring not to hope, the relief was already treacherously crawling through her veins.

He looked cagey for a moment before answering, “Well...that’s one condition of you having it - you can’t ask me where it’s coming from.”

“Remus-” she began at once, not liking the sound of this one bit.

“Come on Tonks,” he cut in, pleading tone in his voice, “you need this money, you know you do!”

“I know that,” she replied hastily, feeling worried now, “but Remus...why can’t you tell me where it’s coming from?”

“Because,” he stated, “that’s the way I want it.”

She stared at him for a moment, as if she would suddenly be able to read his motive from his expression, but Remus had an unnerving ability of making you feel like he was thinking and feeling absolutely nothing.

“I can’t,” she said finally, “I can’t just take money off you like this.”

“I’m giving it to you,” he stated.

“I know but...” she struggled, on one hand she desperately wanted the money, but on the other, “but I have to know where it comes from...”

“From me.”

“You know what I mean,” she said, “is it something illegal?”

“A little.”

“A little!” she exclaimed, “How can it only be a little illegal? I don’t want you doing anything illegal for me, you know one whiff of trouble and you’d be locked up for good!”

“I know that, but this is only a little illegal because some people say so, personally I don’t think it is.”

“I don’t care, I’m not having you locked away because of my stupidity,” she began anxiously, “what makes you think I’d want that to happen-”

“Listen Tonks,” he cut in, shuffling closer to her and tucking a stray wisp of pink hair behind her ear, “do you trust me?”

“Of course,” she said in a small voice.

“Well then, I promise you that this is going to be ok. I’m not going to go to prison,” he told her in a steady, calm voice, “I wouldn’t do anything if I considered it to be illegal, ok? I told you I was going to help you, and that’s what I’m doing.”

“But...” she began and he gave her a stern look, causing her to fall silent.



“Just be gracious and accept it,” he said with a small smile.

Tonks gave him a half worried, half grateful look and he merely shook his head.

“I’ll take that as a yes?” he asked.

She nodded her head silently, before leaning forward and planting a soft, grateful kiss on his mouth. He gave a small smile, leaning forward and threading his fingers through her hair. When they finally broke apart, she looked into his eyes, not sure how to say thank you, or whether she should even let him do this.

“I’ve got to go soon,” he told her, tucking her hair behind her ear again.

“Be careful,” she said anxiously, “please.”

“I will,” he promised, grinning at her worry, “and besides, Bill’s going to be helping me.”

“Bill’s doing it too!” she demanded loudly, “Hang on a minute! You can’t both-”

“Tonks,” he cut in, “stop worrying, he’s just going to get the money for me, he’ll take it straight around to Gringotts. Then we’ve got two weeks to find the next lot, right?”

“Why can’t you get the money?” she asked him quickly.

“You know why,” he said, depreciating smile on his face as he nodded to the calendar tacked to the wall, the next three days were ringed in red - tomorrow night was the full moon.

“Oh,” she said, face falling, “are you going to be ok?”

“Of course,” he shrugged, “I’ll be back in three days time and by then, everything will be a bit better.”

“Ok,” she said, worriedly smoothing down the front of his robes, “the potions all ready isn’t it?”

He nodded just as there was a knock at the door and they both unconsciously shifted into a position that didn’t look so romantic. Whether by design or not, they’d both silently decided not to let anyone know about them yet.

“Come in,” called Tonks, tucking her hair behind her ears, begging silently for it not to be Mrs Weasley.

“Hey little sis,” came to voice, and Bills head poked around the door.

He gave a grin when he saw Remus.

“You ready Remus?” he asked, entering the room now and she noticed he had his travelling cloak on.

“Ready,” he said at once climbing to his feet and picking up his own cloak.

Tonks shot them both anxious looks.

“This is a mistake,” she told Remus worriedly, “you shouldn’t be doing this...”

“Don’t worry,” he said easily.

“Bill - tell him,” she demanded, getting out of bed now.

“You know that wouldn’t make any difference,” he simply said, already walking out of the door.

She turned back to Remus.

“Don’t go?” she pleaded.

“I’ve got to go,” he told her in a serious voice now, “the moon waits for no man.”

“Make it wait for me!” she said, realising how childish she sounded but not caring.

“I wish I could,” he said, giving a crooked smile, “now I want you to look after yourself while I’m away, ok? Don’t try to go back to work again alright? And I’ll be back soon.”

She didn’t say anything, finding her throat too tight to speak. She merely nodded silently, fervently wishing more than anything he wasn’t going to go now.

“I’ll miss you,” she said in a watery voice, feeling embarrassed.

“Me too,” he said, and she suddenly realised how young he looked, beneath all the greying hair and tired lines, “Three days isn’t so long you know.”

“It is.”

“I know,” he replied, before leaning down and giving her a long kiss.

When they broke apart he turned on his heel and quickly left the room, leaving Tonks to drop back onto the bed and stare at the floor. She had nothing to do now but worry about Remus, and try and figure out what he could do that would mean he’d suddenly acquire 100 galleons.

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Meanwhile, on the other side of the country, Harry was waking slowly from the deepest sleep he’d ever had. He felt the uncertain few moments of complete and utter mystification as to who, and where, he was, before life came rushing back to meet him. He gave an inaudible groan and buried his face in the pillows slightly as he did a

brief inventory of pain - it seemed his stomach and throat was the worst of it, although a steady headache was pounding away in the background. Kitty's explanation about an antidote to the poison he was giving flashed into his mind, followed quickly by the memory of the black vial and the stars dimming above him that night in the graveyard. At this thought he turned over to search for Kitty, but found high white curtains blocking his view.

He wondered briefly where Kitty was staying, obviously in the Hospital Wing as she'd visited him that night, but why if she wasn't injured anymore? Or maybe she was, he thought anxiously, and they hadn't told him. He sat up slowly and painfully, collapsing against his pillows after a moment. Just why was he in so much pain still, he asked himself almost grouchy.

He was distracted from further thoughts by the Matron emerging from behind the curtains and fixing him with a stern, yet pleased look.

"Ah, your awake Mr Potter," she stated, moving forwards and at once pulling her wand out, "how are you feeling?"

He opened his mouth to reply, meaning to say 'fine thanks', but all that came out was a scratchy wheeze. After a few attempts clearing his raw throat he gave cough and spluttered out his reply.

"Yes, it'll take a few days for that throat to fully heal," she agreed, leaning forward and pulling back his eyelids one after another, before inspecting his throat, "and the stomach?"

"Sore," he managed, as she raised his robe and inspected the offending item.

Harry frowned at the faint red scar that ran just right of his navel, before the sudden memory of that silver knife flashed before his eyes. He remembered the sound, the sudden pain and then that cold feeling...even the stupid thought that went through his head of how his fingers were cold with the blood and his new shirt was now ripped.

“That’s healing pretty well now, although I think you may retain a faint trace of it, cursed blade I think,” the Matron said absentmindedly as she inspected it closely, trying out a few more spells, “you’ll be pleased to know we’ve got rid of all those ugly stitching marks they left you with.”

“Stitches?” Harry asked blankly, before giving a hiss as she prodded him in a particularly sensitive area.

“Mmm, still more bruising there then obviously,” she murmured to herself, before straightening up, “yes, stitches, from the muggle hospital. It’s lucky we found you so quickly or you’d never have got that kidney back.”

“What?” he demanded as abruptly as his throat let him, “What hospital? What kidney?”

“Miss Earl informed us that after your accident you were taken to the muggle hospital,” she told him gently, “and of course, they did what they could, the poor dears, given what they’ve got to work with, and they took your kidney out. But we’ve replaced it now, the lingering pains your feeling is a combination of the damage from the poison and the cursed knife wound.”

Harry felt like his head was spinning and for a moment he could only gape at the Matron, feeling an odd, cold shudder at the thought of being unconscious for so long while everybody else poked around and removed his organs. Then, after a moment, something else called for his attention.

“What accident?”

“It seems you were involved in a car crash,” she said, before peering at him intently, “do you not remember any of this?”

“But...but...” he spluttered, “how...what car crash?”

“Sometime after your escape from You-Know-Who,” she explained, finally finishing her examination and giving him her full attention, “you

were involved in a car crash. We're a little uncertain of the details, perhaps Miss Earl could explain more, although we gather she was driving."

"But...she can't drive..." Harry said faintly, before giving up and sagging back into his bed.

What had happened to himself and Kitty since he'd last saw her, being dragged out of a circle of Death Eaters two weeks ago? He needed to know, needed to speak to her, what had she done?

"Where's she?" he demanded quickly, wondering how he could begin to rebuild things between him and Kitty.

"I'm not quite sure at the present, she does wander off sometimes," she said, an annoyed frown crossing her face for a moment, "she'll be back presently I'm sure."

Harry slumped back further into the pillows now, thoroughly disinterested in the remaining conversation. After a few more questions about his health, aches and pains, the Matron left to find him some breakfast, drawing back the curtains to reveal an empty hospital wing. Harry sat motionless for some time, staring up at the ceiling as he tried to decipher what had happened - somehow Kitty had escaped from the Death Eaters, found him, then a car, then they'd crashed, wound up in some muggle hosp-

His thoughts were interrupted by the quiet sound of someone shuffling their feet nearby and he looked across for Kitty quickly, before his eyes fell upon someone completely different, two completely different people to be precise.

"Hello Harry," Hermione said anxiously, hovering by the curtain uncertainly.

"Hermione," he said blankly, "Ron."

"Hey mate," Ron nodded, adding his own nervous wave.

Harry stared at them in mute shock, for some reason his best friends had not even entered his mind until now, he had grown so used to trying to block them from his thoughts he'd succeeded. But now they were here, standing in front of him, he felt the warm rush of familiarity and he suddenly realised how much he'd missed them.

"Guys..." he began, gravely voice making him sound even more emotional than he felt.

"Oh Harry!" cried Hermione suddenly, rushing forwards and throwing her arms around his neck, "We've missed you so much! We've been so worried! I thought you we're going to die and I'd never get the chance to tell you I was sorry for not realising sooner that you were upset and not-"

"Hermione," said Ron, gently taking her arms and unwinding them from Harry, "give him some air, you're going to choke him."

"Oh, I'm sorry Harry!" she continued to ramble, twisting her fingers in front of her, "I'm just so happy that you're ok! I was so sure you were going to...to d-die-"

She took a shuddering breath and burst into tears and Harry could do nothing but gape at her as Ron hugged her and patted her awkwardly on the back. He caught Harry's eye and merely rolled his own, as if to say 'girls' and Harry could only give him a crooked smile back which obviously meant 'Hermione'.

"I'm ok, I'm ok," she was saying, drawing back from Ron and wiping her tears and nose with what looked like a well used handkerchief, "it's just been such a long...well...you know..."

"I know..." Harry began, dropping his eyes to the bedclothes so he could avoid seeing the hurt in their eyes, "I'm sorry..."

"Hey no problem," Ron said easily, sitting on the edge of the bed, "everyone here reckon you've gone barmy anyway, so it's not really your fault."

“Ron!” Hermione scolded, giving him a disapproving glare, “don’t say things like that!”

“What? It’s true!” he said indignantly, as Harry stared at them both, “That healer said he’d, and I quote, ‘lost touch with reality’, which we all know is mumbo jumbo for ‘gone barmy’.”

“Well,” she huffed, avoiding Harry’s eyes now and giving Ron a meaningful look, “that may be, but maybe you should keep your opinions to yourself?”

“You reckon I’ve gone mad?” Harry asked, not sure whether to be amused, angry or worried.

“Just a little,” shrugged Ron, “you must be to not use magic and want to live like a muggle-”

“Ron!” cut in Hermione once more, “There’s nothing wrong with living like a muggle.”

“Will you stop telling me off, mother?” Ron said in exasperation, before turning to Harry, “You see what I’ve had to put up with while you’ve been away? She’s been nagging like an old washerwoman ever since you left-”

“Shut it you,” Hermione growled, whacking his arm, “maybe I am nagging! But you are being a git!”

“Always my fault,” he said to the world in general, before turning to Harry again, “I reckon you left because she drove you mad, I tell you what another week of this and I’d be retiring myself to a nice cave somewhere secluded.”

“Right, that’s it!”

And so Harry sat back and watched them bicker like an old married couple, completely forgetting they were in the hospital wing, or what had gone on to bring them there, it was jut like old times, he reflected.



He could tell that most of this was for show, like all their squabbling, and perhaps it was a little louder than usual because they were nervous and were trying to make like everything was ok. But that was fine with him, right now all he wanted was to sit here and listen with a faint smile on his face, just like old times.

He even felt himself laughing and smiling as Hermione attempted to punch Ron into submission, while he sat staring at her, unflinching. He merely reached over ruffled her hair so the Alice band she'd been wearing became dislodged and she roared in frustration.

"She hates that," Ron whispered conspiratorially to him.

"Will you stop doing that!" Hermione demanded furiously, obviously not hearing, "We're here to visit Harry, not for you to act like a three year old!"

"Fine!" he said, holding up his hands in peace.

Harry merely grinned wider because he knew exactly what Ron would do next. He'd wait for Hermione to pat her hair down, smooth the imaginary rumples from her skirt and give them a bright look of expectancy before...

Ron leaned forward and pulled her hair band out again, causing her to roar in anger and him to double over laughing as the blows rained down.

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It'd taken Kitty a long time to build up the courage to walk back to the Hospital Wing to talk to Harry, knowing that their futures depended on so much, that she had things to tell him that he wouldn't like, that he would probably tell her more things she wouldn't like. However, she hadn't even put her foot over the threshold before she stopped dead, eyes drawn over to Harry's bed, where he sat up, quietly laughing at the two people that had been making her life a misery for the past two weeks.

Unconsciously she stepped back into the shadows, watching the happy little reunion whilst feeling like something cold had slithered down into her stomach and was gradually numbing her inside. Harry looked so happy she thought absently, feeling her fists clench by her side as Hermione and Ron exchanged play blows. She tried to rid the bitter taste the scene had left her with, finding it impossible to stop watching them laugh and chat to Harry.

It looked so natural, she thought.

The three of them. The trio. It looked like it had always been that way...and would always be so.

For the past few week she had found it hard to ignore the thought that she didn't belong here, worrying that Harry wouldn't need her when he obviously had all these friends surrounding him, and now the feeling was even worse. She would never be able to do that, sit with him and his friends, just laugh and get along. They hated each other, they were a completely different kind of person, what did she have in common with witches and wizards?

She stepped back even further into the hallway, not wanting to have to witness Harry's real life anymore, because if she did, she wouldn't be able to fight back the jealousy and envy if she did.

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Hermione and Ron had finally calmed down and the level of bickering had dropped to the usual amount of background interference. Harry knew what was coming next; questions, as many as they could fit into their time together, demanding to know everything. Sure enough, no sooner had this thought entered his mind, than Hermione looked over to Ron in some kind of silent communication.

"Where did you go Harry," she began gently, "when you ran away?"

He gave an inward sigh and closed his eyes wearily.

"Wolverhampton," he merely said, "have you ever been?"

“No,” she replied, “is it nice?”

Harry gave this due thought and consideration, “Not really...”

“Well, we sort of found out you were there anyway,” she said carefully, “the Orders been working on tracking you more than anything else since you left, especially Tonks and Professor Lupin.”

“They shouldn’t have bothered,” Harry said distantly, eyes still closed so he couldn’t see their expression.

“They were worried about you Harry,” she said gently, “we all were.”

“I was perfectly safe,” he told her, wincing slightly at his raw throat.

“Well we didn’t know that,” she shot back, and Harry could detect the first hint of the anger he knew she was controlling.

There was a lingering silence and when Harry finally opened his eyes he could see Hermione looking away from him resolutely and Ron watching her worriedly. He shot Harry a glance and when he noticed him, gave a nervous cough.

“So, ah, where did you stay then?” he asked hesitantly.

“A friend of Kitty’s...she had a flat in the city,” Harry replied, wondering immediately where she was, she’d been gone an awfully long time for a walk.

He noticed Ron give Hermione a puzzled look, mouthing the word ‘Kitty’ questioningly to her. Harry could guess what this meant.

“What names she been using here?” he asked, smiling to himself.

“Cathy,” replied Ron, giving him an odd look of confusion.

“That’s an old one...” he mumbled to himself, before sitting up slightly with a hiss of pain, “How’s she been since she got here?”

“She’s been...ok,” said Ron, shooting Hermione another look.

“Good,” he sighed in relief, “have you all been getting along ok?”

After a moments silence, Hermione gave him a bright smile, “We’ve had quite a few conversations with her, haven’t we Ron?”

“What? Oh...yeah right,” he said quickly, nodding his head.

“I’m glad...” Harry said, feeling as if a weight had been lifted off his shoulders, “I never wanted her to find out like this...”

“You were going to tell her?” asked Hermione at once, looking shocked.

“Of course,” Harry said, surprised by her tone, “what did you think...I wouldn’t tell her?”

“I, er, I never really thought about it,” she said, shooting Ron another look, “of course you would!”

“ I was about five minutes from telling her...when all this happened...” he said grimly, “another fantastic display of Voldemort’s impeccable timing...”

They both flinched at this and Harry stared moodily at the bedclothes. He’d been so close to telling her, literally minutes! If he’d told her, what would have happened then? At best they’d have avoided the Death Eaters and turned up at Grimauld Place, safe and sound and ready for the consequences of his actions; at worst, Kitty would have run as fast as she could away from him. Even then though, he conceded, she wouldn’t have found herself in that graveyard as Merlin knows what was done to her while they were separated.

If only he hadn’t been so slow, kept secrets for so long, if only...

“Why did you do it Harry?” Hermione asked suddenly, “Why did you run away?”

Harry looked up in surprise for a moment, having completely forgotten he had company, before he remembered one of Kitty’s lines from so long ago, “I’m not running away from the situation, I’m running towards a new one, as quickly as I can.”

“You wouldn’t understand,” he replied finally.

He was thinking of the prophecy, the veil, of Sirius, Antonius Quibell’s letter, of every person that had been killed or hurt because of him, of Kitty...

How could Ron and Hermione possibly understand all that?

“Of course we would,” she said earnestly, taking a hold of his hand, “Harry, we’re your best friends...we’ve been with you through it all...we’d understand.”

Harry sighed deeply, carefully pulling his hand away from her, “You can’t. You want to, but you can’t. No one can.”

Hermione looked hurt for a moment and Harry stared ahead mutely, let her be offended, it was only the truth.

“Was it Sirius?” she demanded with all the tact of a blunt axe, obviously paying him back for the hurt

Sure enough, when he looked at her he could see tears in her eyes, not anger. He didn’t know what to say, how to explain how he’d been feeling since that train ride from Hogwarts all those weeks ago. The grief, the guilt, the burning desire for everything in his life to be fixed, the wish that The Boy Who Lived had never been him, that the prophecy wasn’t his, that he was normal.

“Harry we understand that you miss him,” she said, mistaking his silence.

Harry frowned at her, "You make him sound like some pet I've lost."

"I'm trying Harry," she said, sounding upset, "but we can't help if you don't tell us anything!"

"I don't need your help!" he said, realising too late this didn't come out how he'd intended.

Hermione just gaped at him for a moment, glancing at Ron before angry red splotches appeared on her pale cheeks.

"Obviously Harry!" she shot back, "You're doing perfectly well on your own, aren't you! You're completely balanced, aren't you?"

"Hermione," said Ron wearily, "this isn't the time."

"What, why not? He's just said we can't understand, but how are we supposed to if he doesn't tell us? He needs help!"

"I'm getting help," Harry cut in fiercely, angered at being discussed as if he was some sort of deranged lunatic.

"What? From her?" she demanded sarcastically.

"Just leave him be," Ron cut in hastily, catching sight of Harry's expression, "he's only just woken up, he needs a bit of peace."

"Oh, of course, and we've all got to do whatever Harry wants!" she ranted, crossing her arms across her chest, "I wouldn't want to be selfish at all, god forbid! It doesn't matter that for the past month he's made our lives hell and doesn't even care!"

"Hermione!" said Ron sharply, "Stop it."

She gave Ron a look of purest fury before standing up and striding out of the bay with a snort of anger. Harry and Ron watched her go in shock, before turning to each other.

“I tell you what mate,” he said a little shakily, “she’s gone mental on me the past month. Completely schizo.”

Harry didn’t reply, still staring after Hermione, mouth agape. He hadn’t failed to recognise the tone of voice in which Hermione had spoken about Kitty and was furious.

“I better go and see if she’s alright,” Ron said quickly, jumping from his seat.

“Yeah, you do that,” he said, watching him striding away in the direction Hermione had stormed off in.

He was just going out through the Hospital Wing doors when a sudden thought occurred to him.

“If you see Kitty, can you tell her I want to speak to her!” he called.

Ron waved in reply and Harry sat back in his pillows, rubbing his tender throat and thinking about both Hermione and Kitty.

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Harry couldn’t remember the last time he’d been so popular. He’d had hardly a moment to himself since he’d woken up, with various people stopping by to say hello, wishing him to get well or merely being silently disapproving. Since Ron and Hermione had left, Mrs Weasley had been in, variously admonishing him before crying with relief, making his stomach squirm guiltily. Similarly, Hagrid had been in, sobbing loudly into his spotted handkerchief how it was all his fault and he should have known sooner.

Even Professor McGonnagall, Snape and Flitwick had appeared, staring him down as if he were part of the Spanish Inquisition and reprimanding him on running away. Snape merely had a satisfied smirk on his face as if he’d been proven right in his opinions of Harry and wasted no time in explaining it was him who’d concocted the antidote to his poison.

Around lunch time there was a lull in the amount of traffic in and out of the Hospital Wing and Harry guessed everyone must have been having lunch in the Great Hall; he wondered if everyone was here for him or whether Hogwarts was just as busy out of term time as in. He had become increasingly suspicious of Kitty's absence, and the more time that went by, the stronger the feeling that something serious was wrong grew.

What if she never wanted to talk to him again? Last night she told him she was furious and he could understand why - because he'd lied about his entire life - but what had she really meant? Had she decided she didn't like him anymore, that he was too dangerous, too weird?

Can people fall out of love, he wondered to himself, feeling panicked. He didn't really have any experience in this field but was pretty sure the idea of falling out of love with Kitty seemed ridiculous and impossible. And if that was the case, surely she'd feel the same way?

His paranoid thoughts ran around and around in his head until he decided he'd had enough and would go and find her. He pushed back the bedclothes and tried to swing his feet over the edge, before a stabbing pain in his stomach made him fall back, teeth gritted. He spent a few moments, fighting against the pain, before it began to dissipate and he pulled the bedclothes back over him in surrender.

He'd just have to wait for her to come to him, he decided, lying back into the pillows and keeping up a careful watch of the doorway. Finally, after what seemed like hours, she was suddenly there, standing in the doorway as she carefully scoped out the room.

He cast her a relieved smile as she began to walk over slowly, watching the floor instead of where she was going. Harry studied her closely, as if her expression would give something away, but as usual it was carefully constructed to be an indeterminable as one of her stories.

When she reached his bay she hovered at the foot of the bed.



“Hiya Harry,” she said, hands gripping the bedstead tightly, “how are you feeling?”

“Alright,” he replied, voice sounding a little gravelly again, “a little sore...”

“Oh,” came the reply, sounding too polite and formal to be Kitty, “I’m sure the nurse will give you something for it soon...”

She lapsed into silence and Harry studied her, desperately wishing none of this had happened, that he’d told her his big secret that day, that they’d turned back up at Grimauld Place, that Kitty could still look him in the eye.

“Where - where did you go?” he asked, trying to keep the accusing tone out of his voice.

“Just sitting outside, having a smoke,” she replied, pulling her Zippo sligher out almost unconsciously and beginning to flick the lid open and closed, “figured you had a bit of the ‘friends reunited’ thing to do first.”

“Yeah, they weren’t too happy with me...” he said, grimacing slightly.

“You’re not too popular around here,” she replied, causing him to flinch for an entirely different reason, “but they’ll forgive you soon enough - people always do.”

Harry felt lightly cheered by this, was she including herself in that statement? As if in answer she walked around the bed until she was beside him, studying his appearance intently.

“You look loads better already,” she noted.

He smiled slightly, wondering how long the formal chat would last. He wanted nothing more than for everything to be as it was, for them to be able to sit right there and talk the day away and forget any of this had ever happened. He wondered if she was thinking the same thing, but as usual her thoughts were hidden from him.

“You look so different,” he began, studying her face intently.

“It’s only been two weeks,” she said depreciatingly, avoiding his eyes.

“But all those cuts and bruises...they’re gone-” he began, raising a hand to brush her cheek that usually sported a half-healed scar and smudged bruises.

However, Kitty took a sudden step back out of his reach and his hand froze in mid-air. Harry looked at her with barely concealed hurt as she wrapped her arms around her stomach protectively.

“Are you scared of me now or something?” he asked flatly, dropping his arm heavily back onto the bed.

She shook her head mutely, some kind of internal battle going on as he felt a cold chill chase down his spine.

“No of course not...” she said finally, “this is just a little strange for me...I’ve waited so long for you to wake up and thought of all the things I’d say, but I can’t remember any of them now.”

She sat down on the seat Ron had previous used, pulling her legs up until she was sitting cross legged. Just watching her do this made him smile for some reason.

“Its all been a little bit shocking actually,” she said, giving a dry laugh, “a lot to take in, if you know what I mean...not many people find out their boyfriends are wizard boy-wonders.”

Harry flinched again at this and she fixed him with a penetrating glare.

“Why couldn’t you just tell me Harry?” she asked bluntly. “You said you trusted me...but you lied...for weeks and weeks...”

Harry tore his gaze away from her and looked away for a long moment, various emotions and replies flitting through his mind as Kitty stared at him expectantly.

“Harry?” she demanded, when it seemed no answer was forthcoming.

He jerked back to look at her, feeling the crushing guilt of everything that had happened in the past few weeks build up in the way it couldn't with Ron and Hermione.

“I couldn't,” he whispered.

“Why not?” she replied, lightning fast.

“I just couldn't.”

“Why?” she repeated angrily, “Why couldn't you? Because you didn't trust me? Because you thought I was too stupid to understand-”

“No...” he cut in, wincing slightly, “you know I...I don't think that...”

“Then why?” she asked through gritted teeth, finding his aversion to answering her infuriating and hurtful.

“Because...” he began, eyes pleading with her to listen and understand, “because I didn't want you to be dragged into this...I wanted to forget about it...keep you safe...”

“You wanted to keep me safe?” she asked in an even voice, before it began to climb the octaves, “Safe? SAFE? Since I've met you I've been stalked! Beaten up! Electrocuted! Shot at! Kidnapped! Tortured! Been in a car crash! I've become wanted by the police for murder! Nearly drowned in a lake! Threatened by mythical creatures and interrogated by your 'friends' who want to steal my memories! And worst of all my boyfriend turns out to be a wand-waving wizard who battles Dark Lords! So forgive if I'm not really feeling VERY FUCKING SAFE AT THE MOMENT!”

Before Harry had a chance to react to her violent outburst or she had time to even gather her breath, the curtains around the bay were ripped open.

“Miss Earl!” came a scandalised voice, shortly followed by the Matron, looking positively horrified, “For goodness sakes! What is all the noise about?”

Tonks and Bill also entered to find Kitty stood on her feet looking red in the face as she glared at Harry. Tonks hustled over to her and Bill shot him a look of alarm and all was confused for a moment.

“It’s fine! It’s fine!” Kitty was repeating loudly, looking anything but.

“Come on Cathy,” Tonks was saying soothingly, “this isn’t the time for this now...”

“No! It’s fine! I’ll be quiet now, I promise!” she gushed, giving them all a bright, albeit slightly manic grin, “Just a little outburst! Tired, stressed you know how it is!”

“Cathy, come on,” said Bill calmly, obviously trying to strike some sense into her.

“I’m fine!” she said loudly, finding it difficult to appear as collected as she wanted, “I’m just talking to Harry!”

“Come on sweetie,” tried Tonks, taking her by the elbow.

“No...it’s fine Tonks,” cut in Harry unexpectedly and everyone turned and stared at him.

Whether they’d become used to his still, silent form, or where too concentrated on Cathy, they seemed surprised to see him for a moment.

“Mr Potter-” began the Matron, but he cut in once more.

“Honestly...just give us five minutes?” he asked croakily.

Everyone looked slightly unsure what to do next so he pressed his advantage.

“Please?”

“Well...five minutes only,” said the Matron, still looking puzzled as to why she was giving in, “and strictly no shouting!”

“I promise,” Harry said and for a moment Tonks caught the corner of Kitty’s lips twitch.

They all left and drew the curtains once more and for a moment both parties were both surrounded with uncomfortable silence. Kitty shuffled back towards him and after a moment stood by his side unsure whether to take his hand or not she dropped back into her seat. She stared at his blanket for a long time as he waited for her to start, he didn’t think he had the courage, or the words, for what they wanted to express.

“I’ve been sat here for nearly two weeks Harry,” she began suddenly in a dull voice, “two weeks...”

“I’m sorry,” he said flinching as if she’d yelled.

“And all that time I was thinking,” she began again, “just thinking...things going over in my mind, you know? About everything. About what happened...”

She paused, taking her time to smooth down some rumpled piece of blanket that was non-existent.

“I know...I’m sorry...” Harry said, watching the emotions flit across the usually guarded face.

“And I’ve been terrified for every single second of those two weeks,” she said, almost matter-of-factly, “I feel like I can’t tell between nightmares and real life any more.”

“Kitty...” he whispered, sounding hurt and horrified at the same time, “I’m so sorry...”

“Don’t you dare say that to me!” she said suddenly harsh, eyes blazing, “No more sorries, ok? I know you wouldn’t have done this to me on purpose. I know you’d never want to see me hurt - I saw you trying to sacrifice yourself for me, remember? So don’t tell me you’re sorry, ok? It’s pointless, I get it!”

Harry stared at her in silence now, knowing that he opened his mouth again, he’d only apologise. She was refusing to meet his eyes now and continued to smooth down the invisible creases in his blanket.

“You know, the thing I’ve been worried about the most isn’t the graveyard, those people, curses or the creatures. I could deal with that. It’s not the police after me, it’s not Him,” she said quietly, “it’s you.”

Harry frowned slightly.

“Whether you’re still you. The Harry I know. My Harry,” she said, looking up to him now, “the person I love - loved...”

He found it difficult to unstick his throat, and when he did his already weak voice sounded pathetic, even to him.

“I am,” he whispered.

She flinched slightly and looked even more unbalanced by his response.

“How do I know?”

“Because...because you know me...” he tried, not even caring about the anguish entering his voice, “because I love you Kitty...and I’d do anything for you...because I need you...”

In a sudden jerking moment she took hold of his hand and was squeezing it tightly.

“Harry,” she said in an oddly strained voice, but seemed to lose her inspiration because she fell silent.

Instead she just studied his eyes, as if she’d somehow find everything she wanted there. Dull green met electric blue for what seemed like an age, almost as if they’d lost the ability to say what they wanted to now but knew deep down, this was the only way.

“You asked me a long time ago now, why I went to lunch with you the day we met,” Harry blurted out suddenly, almost as shocked by his own voice as Kitty was, “when we’d hated each other at school?”

She nodded silently.

“I should have told you the first time you asked. You thought it was because I didn’t trust you...but I do...Always have...More than I trust myself,” he said, trying desperately not to let the exhaustion punctuate his speech, “and when I met you...I couldn’t understand why you liked me...because...because to you, I was just Harry.”

In one moment Kitty understood everything. He’d said in just six words why he’d acted like he had since they met, all the secrets and the lies...why he loved her and she loved him.

Because to her, he was just Harry.

Even now, surrounded by witches and wizards, spells and ghosts, potions and magic wands...all she could see was Harry.

Just Harry.

“I never meant to come back here,” he was saying far off, unaware that she didn’t need to hear another word, “I didn’t tell you because...I was trying to forget...to be normal...to live my life the way I wanted to...just for once.”

He fell silent and gazed anxiously at her, the expression on his face showed her he obviously thought she didn't believe him.

"Kitty, I was going to tell you," he began in anguish, "that day...that was my news...I wanted you to know...you've got to belie-

"Harry," she cut in, before looking over to him with a strangely calm look on her face, "do you know what? I get it."

He stared at her for a moment, and his expression must have been a sight because Kitty broke into a wide grin that seemed totally out of place with their conversation.

"At least," she began, standing up and moving to sit perched on the edge of his bed, "I can understand why you would be scared to show somebody who you really are, because if you don't like it yourself, how can anyone else?"

Harry watched her as she spoke thinking about when he first met her, when she was a 'chronic liar' and how her life story would always change day-to-day, or have huge plot holes in it, and how long it had taken him to dig through everything and find the truth.

"We're not so different, me and you," she said, a little self-consciously, "are we?"

"Guess not," he replied in the same tone.

"We're both good at keeping secrets," she continued, before giving him a sidelong glance, "and even better at finding them out."

"Guess so," he repeated thoughtfully.

Suddenly Kitty gave a grin as if she'd just thought of something and gave a laugh, "Although, I'd say you have a more feature film style of revelations, whereas I'm more episodic. You've had a few weeks to get to know Kitty Earl, I had an hour?"



He gave a sudden snort of laughter, taking them both surprise as he felt the unused muscles of his face move into action.

“Trust you to compare this to the movies in some way,” he replied, trying not to laugh now because his stomach was still painful, “as usual.”

Kitty laughed as well and Harry suddenly felt like he was sitting back in Donna’s flat.

“And do you know what?” she asked him, unconsciously picking up his hand and lacing her fingers with his, “I probably wouldn’t have believed you even if you had told me - sounds like something from the movies!”

He grinned slightly, rubbing a thumb across the back of her hand, holding hands was such a little gesture he thought to himself, but it was amazing how differently he felt now.

“I was worried about that,” he admitted, “I was trying to think of a way to convince you...”

“What did you decide on?” she asked, looking bemused.

“Well, a spell obviously,” he said, feeling a little self-conscious still of talking about this sort of thing with Kitty, “something pretty and harmless.”

“Sounds like me,” she said sweetly, before laughing and settling back in her chair again.

“You wish,” he retorted, poking his tongue out at her.

“You really are the same you aren’t you?” she asked happily, “still as stupid and immature as you were the first time I met you.”

“What happened to ‘wizard boy wonder’?” he asked lightly.

“I’m revising my opinion of your new found celebratory status,” she replied smartly, “I don’t know what’s more shocking, that you’re a wizard or you’re famous.”

“You a bit star struck now?” he asked in mock importance.

“Hardly, remember I’ve seen you drunk,” she said with a mischievous grin, “and first thing in the morning.”

He settled for a laugh, feeling his heart buoyed up more than he could have thought possible only minutes ago.

“Kitty...are you sure you’re ok with all this?” he asked carefully, not really able to believe his change in fortunes.

“I’m ok with you, that’s a start,” she said, giving his hand a gentle squeeze, “I’ve got so many questions to ask you that I can hardly think where to start! And I’ve got so much to tell you...so much has happened Harry...”

“I know,” he replied quietly.

“But now were together again...” she began, sounding intensely self-conscious, “it’ll be easier...won’t it?”

“Yeah...” he agreed, “and I promise I’ll tell you everything.”

And Harry suddenly realised that he meant it. He would tell her everything. Every single detail of his life, all the things he’d been holding back from Ron and Hermione, his hopes, his fears, everything. How it felt to know that it was very likely he was going to die soon, how it felt to carry the weight of expectation, of hope, of guilt on his shoulders.

What murder or be murdered really meant.

Kitty must have sensed the depth of his thoughts, because her expression grew serious again and she leant forward towards him.

“Harry,” she began, brushing his hair off his forehead slowly, “I promise I’ll always be here for you...no matter what.”

“No matter what?” he asked her fearfully.

“No matter what,” she stated firmly, “because I love you...and that’s all that matters now.”

“But things aren’t going to be good for a long time,” he told her hesitantly.

“Well, when you find out what it’s like to have an easy life, tell me, and we can feel sorry for ourselves for not knowing,” she told him grimly.

“Kitty, this is different...this is dangerous,” he said anxiously.

“I know Harry.”

“But I don’t want to put you in danger,” he told her, suddenly remembering the sound of her scream echoing around the graveyard.

“Harry, I’ve always been in trouble,” she told him gently, “remember my secrets? It’s not so safe to be me either.”

“But we had a clean break...you had a clean break,” he struggled, thinking of the plans for that holiday in Cornwall, “and I don’t want you to get hurt because of me, it’s already happened once...”

“And you can stop right there,” she told him softly, “I know what you’re thinking...you’re not going to feel like you’re messing up my life. I chose you, and everything that comes with that deal. I knew this Riddle was after you long before I found out what he was, and it didn’t stop me, did it?”

“But this is different, he’s not just some mobster Kitty,” he told her seriously, “and he’d kill you first chance he got...and it would be my

fault...you don't deserve to be with someone who'll put you in danger."

"I think Riddle's got his own reasons for killing me now, not just because I'm with you Harry," she replied quietly, "if you're right and he's still alive, then he's going to be pretty pissed off at me."

Harry stared at her for a long moment she was right of course. He hadn't given any more thought to how she'd rescued him with all the commotion of the day, but now he realised he was right; Voldemort was after her now too.

"I'm so sorry Kitty," he said at once, anxiety lacing his voice, "I'm so sorry for getting you into this..."

Kitty gave a weak smile, strange expression on her face as if she was reading his mind and was amused by what she saw. After a moment she got up and sat on the edge of the bed next to him, reaching up and brushing his fringe off his forehead once more.

"Harry...I don't hate you because of this," she said as she ran a finger from the tip to the base of his lightning bolt scar, just as she had done all those weeks ago when they'd shared their first kiss, "and I don't love you for it either."

"To me, you're Just Harry, and you always will be. This is my choice, and I don't want you to feel guilty for it."

She leant forward and placed a soft kiss on his lips which Harry returned, trying to avoid the feeling like he was sealing a death warrant. No matter what Kitty said, he knew she would never have been hurt if it wasn't for him, but the selfish part of him whispered back that he was glad he'd met her, because she made everything seem a bit easier. As he kissed her, he reached up to stroke her cheek with his hand, feeling breathless and light headed already.

After a moment, he broke away with a gasp, trying to steady his pounding head. She gave a soft laugh and he shot her a crooked smile and shrug of explanation.

“Sorry,” he said a little unsteadily, “guess I’m still a little muzzy.”

“I wouldn’t tell the nurse if I was you, she’s after my blood already,” she said, thoughtfully tasting her lips.

She reached out and brushed her finger against his own, “You’re lips are all cracked. Either you’ve been kissing all the girls or you’ve had a near death experience. Either way I’ve got a chapstick.”

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Unknowingly, Tonks and Bill had sat across the other side of the Hospital Wing tensed and ready to spring into action should another outbreak of argument occur, but ten minutes later they’d heard and seen nothing else. Their conversation skirted light subjects before they finally accepted that things were going well behind the tall white curtains. Privately, Tonks was ecstatic, knowing how much Kitty had been desperately waiting for this.

“It’s all pretty quiet in there,” reflected Bill, head cocked to one side during a lull in their conversation.

“Reckon it must be going well,” she replied in a low voice, “we can relax a bit now.”

They were silent for a moment as Bill studied Tonks surreptitiously, although it had been several days since she’d come out of St Mungo’s, she still looked pale and weary.

“You get along well with Cathy, don’t you?” he asked curiously, noticing how tense Tonks actually was.

“Yeah, if you got to know her you’d probably really like her,” Tonks suggested grinning, “although I’ll admit, she’s hard work.”

“I can see that,” he said with a nod of the head towards the hospital bed, “she’s got a decent set of lungs on her by the sounds of it - poor Harry. But then again, I’ve heard he can yell something chronic too.”

“A perfect match,” laughed Tonks, “I remember some of the blazing rows me and Charlie used to have...just part and parcel I guess.”

“Tell me about it,” grimaced Bill, stretching back in his seat, “Fleur is quite able to scream if the sudden urge takes her, as it often does.”

“Ah, it’s all part of our feminine charm,” Tonks said, chuckling slightly, “and anyway, she’s got plenty to think about now - what with your massive wedding to plan. Bound to be stressful.”

“True,” said Bill, far off smile on his face that told Tonks he was busy daydreaming about his beautiful fiancée.

Tonks laughed to herself, finding her thoughts sliding back to Remus. Somehow she couldn’t envision them having blazing rows, he was far too adept at calming situations. Although, she reminded herself, it was only a few weeks back that she was screaming at him at the top of her lungs and he was quite able to snap back the retorts.

A quick glance out the window presented her with the glowing, pearlescent full moon and she sighed heavily. She hoped he was ok, wasn’t in any pain, and that he’d be back soon. Although she’d known Remus long enough now to see him after the full moon, somehow now it was worse, because she was allowed to properly worry.

“Where did Remus get the money from Bill?” she blurted out suddenly.

Bill looked at her in surprise, before constructing a carefully blank expression.

“I don’t know,” he replied evenly, “he just gave me the money.”

Tonks studied him for a moment.

“You’re lying,” she said flatly, “how illegal is it, honestly?”

“I didn’t even know it was,” he shrugged, giving in before she got started, knowing Tonks was too good at interrogation.

“Is it dangerous?” he demanded.

“No,” replied Bill quickly.

Tonks narrowed her eyes at him.

“What’s he doing-” she began once more.

“Listen Tonks,” said Bill, turning to her and fixing her with a serious look, “he didn’t want you to know for a reason, and when he wants to tell you, he will, it’s not for me to say. Isn’t it enough that he’s willing to do something for you because he loves you?”

She stared at him in shock for a moment - she didn’t even know that anyone knew about her and Remus - how had Bill found out? She thought she’d been doing a great acting job, but clearly not.

“You look like a goldfish,” he joked, “close your mouth or it’ll stick like that. Come on baby sis, I’ve known for ages that this was going to happen.”

“How...?”

“Just psychic I guess,” he shrugged modestly, “that and the fact Fleur pointed it out after being in the same room as you two for five minutes.”

She grinned, looking slightly embarrassed for a moment.

“Can you, er, not say anything for a while?” she asked him hesitantly, “We haven’t decided what we’re going to do...how we’re going to play it.”

“It’ll be my secret,” he promised, with a curious look at her, “and Charlie’s of course.”

“Charlie knows!” she demanded in a hoarse voice, “How!”

“Caught you red handed by the sounds of it, but don’t worry,” he said, noticing her look of alarm, “he won’t say anything, I’ve already had words.”

“Oh, right,” she said hollowly, “thanks...”

“No problem,” he said, before looking up suddenly, “oh, looks like the reunions being broken up.”

Sure enough, the Matron was striding purposefully towards Harry’s bed and they both got to their feet.

“Coming for some dinner in the Hall?” he asked.

“No, I think I’ll head home,” she said, “or Grimauld Place anyway...need some sleep and time to mope.”

Bill just laughed and handed her the heavy travelling cloak off he back of the chair.

“See you tomorrow.”

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Kitty and Harry were still deep in conversation, when a noise behind them made her look around to find the matron pulling back the curtain slightly and putting her head around it.

“Miss Earl, it’s dinner time now, I’ll have to ask you to leave Mr Potter now,” she said sternly, as if Kitty was blatantly flaunting the rules, “you know he needs his rest.”

“Right,” she nodded hastily, eager to keep on the right side of her, especially after her last outburst.

She gave a firm nod and disappeared around the curtain again.



“I better go,” she sighed, looking down at Harry in disappointment.

“Ok...see you soon,” he said, looking frustrated at this interruption as well.

“I’ll go and have dinner in the Hall with Ron and Hermione,” she told him in her best chronic liar voice.

Harry gave a pleased smile, which she returned, trying to ignore the seething pit of anger in her stomach when she even thought about Harry’s friends.

“You’re getting on ok then?” he asked, obvious relief in her voice.

“Of course,” she told him, rolling her eyes at his worry, “once you get past all of the abracadabra stuff.”

Climbing to her feet she gave him a smile, before leaning down and planting a soft kiss on his lips, insides writhing at the guilt of lying to Harry so soon in their new relationship

“ I’m glad, I did worry that...” he trailed off, looking slightly embarrassed for some reason.

“What? That they wouldn’t like me?” she joked, “Come on Harry, you know I have a magnetic personality.”

“Yeah right,” he smirked sarcastically, “Go and have a nice dinner, it’ll probably be better than what I’m having.”

“It’s your own fault,” she said airily, “for nearly getting yourself killed...I’ll see you later?”

“Yeah...bye...”

“Bye Harry,” she said, giving him a small wave and disappearing behind the curtain.

She stood for a few moments and watched it for no reason that she could discern, before looking towards the doorway into the corridors thoughtfully. Now that she knew for certain that she and Harry would be fine, she had to figure out what to do about the escalating Hermione/Ron situation. Obviously she wouldn't be able to tell Harry how they'd really be getting along, not only would it probably upset him, but she couldn't take his disappointment, especially now she knew he was going to tell her all about his double life.

She finally gave a resolute nod of her head as she made up her mind. She'd go and speak to Harry's friends, explain how they'd got off on the wrong foot and suggest a truce, failing that, she'd threaten them into not saying anything to Harry. She thought the latter would probably be her best idea as the thought of having a truce with those two after everything they'd said and done to her was unthinkable.

Heading back to her bed, she pulled her rucksack out from the bedside cabinet and pulled out her favourite jeans and her black shirt, getting changed quickly behind the curtains. However, she realised the robes she'd been wearing were infinitely warmer than her tee shirt, no doubt there was some magical reason she sighed, and was soon rooting about for a jumper. Finally she found one, pulling it out and giving a sudden smile of recognition at it.

Hand-knitted and emerald green in colour, Harry's favourite jumper had somehow found its way into her bag. She tried to picture his reaction if he knew she had it.

'Yeah, somehow found its way into your bag, eh Kitty?'

She gave a snigger and pulled it on, wrapping her arms around it and savouring the warmth and familiar smell before squaring her shoulders and setting off. Her trip to the Great Hall was uneventful, she even managed to ignore the paintings, which were all wandering about or sitting down to eat, and arrived at the double doors a little sooner than she'd realised. She peaked through them, seeing a surprising number of people enjoying dinner together.

The whole of the Weasley clan it seemed, although she'd never managed a full headcount and was convinced there were more lurking in the woodwork, as well as Hermione and many older witches and wizards were sat at the long central table. At the sight of so many black robed people she began to feel her nerve leaving her and she murmured almost to herself, "You're not scared of anything Kitty," despite everything pointing against it.

She quickly pushed the door open before she changed her mind, stepping in and trying to close it as quietly as possible and sneak in. However, when she turned around she found many of the faces looking up at her and again she almost lost her nerve. And there was no sign of Tonks or Remus.

With a nervous gulp and a mighty force of will she gave a weak smile to the room in general, walking across the flagstone floor with what seemed like booming footsteps. The table she saw was dotted with groups of people and she made out Ron and Hermione sitting slightly separated from everyone else, deep in conversation. The rest of the Weasley's were sitting further down, all of them watching her out of the corner of their eyes, like nearly everyone else.

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"I don't believe it, she's wearing Harry's jumper," hissed Ginny to the twins, glaring at the girl as she walked into the hall, "our Weasley jumper, talk about cheek!"

Fred and George both craned their necks a little to see better and Ginny watched her every move, gripping her fork a little too tightly. There was no way you could get around the fact, she hated this girl, this muggle. Sauntering around the castle thinking she scared everybody, smoking and teasing them as if she could possibly hurt them...Flicking her stupid, weird hair about an bad mouthing her family and Hermione...

"Harry must have been seriously traumatised by last month," she murmured to herself in wonder, "to date her."

“She does have a certain Slytherin air about her,” agreed Fred, “maybe Harry and her don’t talk much.”

“Come on guys,” interjected George, “if it wasn’t for her Harry would still be out cold, or worse, dead.”

“Well, if it wasn’t for her, Harry would never had got into the position where he could have been hurt in the first place,” retorted Ginny, still glaring at the girl, who was striding over to her brother and Hermione.

“You don’t know that,” George replied mildly.

“Oh, I’m sorry, since when did you join the Cathy ‘I’m-a-bitch-deal-with-it’ Earl fan club?”

“I’m just saying,” shrugged George, “and you know I’m right - it was her we’ve got to thank for him waking up, so just deal with it.”

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Only Ron and Hermione seemed to be unaware of her arrival and with a sudden burst of confidence she made herself walk over to them. As she approached them their hushed, intense conversation ceased and they looked up to her with wary looks of surprise on their face.

“Mind if I sit down?” she asked with a bright smile, already sliding onto the bench before they could answer.

“Er, fine,” said Ron, shooting Hermione an alarmed look.

Kitty looked about the room for a moment, it was her first time in the Great Hall and she was amazed by the impressive looking portraits lining the walls, the fluttering banners, and further up the impressive oaken rafters. As her eyes travelled further up, inexplicably drawn to the ceiling she gave a gasp of delighted surprise - there was no ceiling, just blue sky and clouds drifting by. It took her only a split seconds to realise it wasn’t real, only a illusion, and she revised her opinion of magic minutely, maybe sometimes it could be good.

“It’s bewitched,” blurted out Ron, drawing Kitty’s eyes back down to earth, “to er, look like the sky outside...”

His cheeks darkened and she gave a slight grin. Thinking back, she realised, she wasn’t aware of Ron ever really saying anything to her before, it seemed Hermione was the voice of the outfit.

“It’s cool,” she replied in acknowledgment, shooting a look at Hermione.

The girl was glaring at her potatoes as if they’d mortally offended her.

“So, what’s a girl got to do to get some grub?” she asked, glancing down at her place to find it empty of both plate and cutlery.

She glanced around but everyone seemed to have got their dinner already. Hermione, who had been silent up until this point, suddenly spoke.

“The table doesn’t realise there’s anyone sitting there as you’re muggle,” she explained, “otherwise the elves would send you a plate.”

Kitty stared at the girl, trying to figure out how she could have just said that frankly bizarre sentence without cracking a smile and whether they were playing a joke on her. However, she only leant forward, brandishing her wand.

She couldn’t help it, even after being in this place for over two weeks, seeing wands and magic about her still caught her by surprise and even scared her a little and this time was no exception. She jumped up with an exclamation, causing the bench she was sitting on to crash to the floor. Hermione froze, mid-stretch across the table, wand still poised.

“I’m just getting your plate,” she explained slowly, rapping the wood with her wand, “See?”

Suddenly a silver plate and set of cutlery appeared and Kitty couldn't stop herself jumping even further back in surprise. The room had grown silent as adults and students alike watched her nervous behaviour and even worse, she thought to herself angrily, she could see Ginny and the twin boys trying not to laugh amongst themselves.

"Thanks," she said, a little more savagely than she meant to, bending down to right her seat before dropping into it. She couldn't help but think that Hermione had planned that.

She heard a sudden burst of laughter further up the table and closed her eyes wearily, they were making it really hard for her to want to sort things out.

She ran a shaking hand through her tangled braids as she surveyed the food in front of her. Silver trays stretched ahead of her full of vegetables, with various pies and gravy boats of sauces flanking them so the table was practically bowing under the weight. No chips, no burgers, nothing tasty...just typical school food. She finally decided that potatoes would be the safest way to go and set about stabbing a few with her fork and dropping them on her plate.

She began to eat in silence, listening as the murmur rose up again and she wondered whether this was a good idea. Perhaps she should just tell Harry that she just couldn't get along with his friends, that it wasn't his fault, but true.

But then she thought about the future. What kind of life would it be if she couldn't get along with his friends? She'd need all the friends she could get when the inevitable discussion about what would happen to both her and Harry arose.

How did everything come to this, she found herself thinking. It seemed like only a few days ago they were watching movies, fighting over the last of the ice cream, kissing in the back row of the cinema...And now, she was surrounded by witches, tables that thought for themselves, elves? How could she be sitting here trying to bridge the cultural chasm whilst Harry lay in a hospital bed?

How could that be Harry? How could he have changed so much in such a short amount of time?

“He’s already looking better, isn’t he?” asked Ron suddenly, obviously trying to cover up the awkward silence.

Both Kitty and Hermione nodded.

“I’ll be happier when he can talk without sounding like he’s been swilling gravel,” Hermione replied, prodding her food again, “and sit up without looking exhausted.”

“He’s always been quick at recoveries,” Ron replied reassuringly to Kitty more than Hermione, “a few more days and he’ll be bored of being confined to the Hospital Wing and desperate to get out.”

“He’ll stay as long as he needs to,” Hermione said firmly and Kitty threw her an irritated look - she sounded like a nagging mother.

She could tell Ron didn’t hold the same grudge that Hermione did, he seemed almost eager to include her into the conversation, despite Hermione’s best attempts to the contrary. She decided to wind things up.

“Listen guys, let’s just cut the polite chat shall we?” she asked dropping her fork, “I’m no good at it and it’s boring.”

“Fine,” said Hermione shortly, giving her a challenging look, “what do you want?”

Kitty grinned slightly at Hermione’s hostility.

“Why do you hate me so much?” she asked curiously, “I’ve got a pretty good idea, based on our previous conversations, but humour me.”

Hermione refused to answer this question and Kitty gave a small shrug of the shoulders and looked at Ron.

“Fine, whatever...Harry said you guys are angry at him,” she stated questioningly.

“We’re not angry at him,” Ron said hastily, shooting Hermione a glance, obviously trying to gauge her temper.

“Of course we are,” snapped Hermione, giving Ron a withering look.

“Why?” demanded Kitty, “Because he ran away? Big deal, haven’t you ever felt like it?”

“No!” she retorted angrily, “I don’t believe in running away from my responsibilities or my friends.”

“Lucky you,” she replied in a despairing tone, “So you’re quite happy for Harry to be hunted down by a raving psychopath?”

“Of course not!” replied Hermione, going slightly pale, “You don’t understand! Harry running away didn’t mean that Voldemort would suddenly stop looking for him, he just made his life a lot more dangerous - and yours.”

“Don’t pretend you care,” Kitty warned her, “Anyway, Harry ran away, now he’s back...so as far as I can see there’s no problem.”

Hermione opened her mouth quickly to disagree when Ron cut in.

“Hermione, let’s just drop it for a second,” he said to her in an undertone Kitty wasn’t obviously meant to hear.

He turned to Kitty, “Don’t worry - we’ll talk to Harry...we’re just tired right now. It’s been a long month.”

Kitty hadn’t been expecting this and was taken by surprise for a moment - Ron didn’t seem the type to take action into his own hands, or speak to her semi-normally. Obviously Hermione was taken aback to because she shot Ron and look of incredulity.



“Right...well...good,” said Kitty, thrown slightly off track, “He’ll appreciate it...he hasn’t had so good a month either.”

Ron and Hermione both looked at her curiously, obviously awaiting further details but Kitty was sure as hell not going to start reliving her and Harry’s life to these two just because Ron had seen how thick they’d been acting.

“There was one other thing I wanted to talk to you about,” she said, stabbing a potato and examining it carefully.

They both looked up to her silently.

“Has Harry asked you about me yet? I mean, whether we’ve been getting along?”

“Yes,” said Ron, shooting Hermione another look.

“And what did you say?” she demanded, “Did you tell him the truth?”

“Er...no,” Ron replied, “we told him we’ve been getting along...”

He went red once again and Kitty grinned to herself, they were both obviously embarrassed by their arguments and didn’t want Harry to know as much as she didn’t.

“Good,” she said happily, “me too. I don’t think he really wants to hear what’s been going on the past few weeks here, does he?”

Hermione glared at her.

“So how about a little deal?” she suggested, “You won’t tell him if I won’t, we pretend we’re the happy little group.”

“What’s in it for you?” asked Hermione.

Kitty knew that Hermione could never understand why she’d want to protect Harry from horrible truths, why she wouldn’t want him to think his friends could act like that against her, why she wanted to save

him the worry. Hermione would never believe her, wouldn't think she was capable of thinking like that, so she settled with a slight shrug of the shoulders.

"Sounds good to me Hermione," Ron said, turning to her, "Harry needs us there for him now...this can wait."

Hermione glared at her plate, before finally sighing, "Fine! For what it's worth, I do feel bad for some of the things I said."

"Only some?" asked Kitty, unable to stop her grin.

"Yes, only some," snapped Hermione, "if you ask me, you've demanded so much sympathy for your position without even considering ours."

"Maybe I'd be a bit more sympathetic if you'd been a bit nicer," replied Kitty sweetly.

Hermione bit back her retort and Ron sighed heavily.

"This is never going to work if you two can't stop goading each other and fighting," he said simply, and rather bravely in Kitty's opinion, "Hermione, just admit you were wrong for once and Cathy, stop being so self-centred."

"What!" demanded Hermione instantly, face flushing with anger as Kitty merely improved her opinion of Ron, "How dare you! What is that supposed to mean?"

"Stop shouting at me," Ron said quietly, "Just admit that you were wrong to take out your worry on Cathy, she's only tried to help!"

And with that he got up and walked over to where his brothers and sister was sitting, staring at them all with open mouths, and joining them. Both Kitty and Hermione stared at him for a moment in surprise.

"Man, you're not popular right now are you?" Kitty couldn't help but observe with amusement.

Hermione shot her a filthy look, "Oh shut up."

And with that she also got to her feet and stormed out of the room. Kitty grinned to herself slightly; something told her Hermione would be a lot more upset at Ron being angry at her than if it was Harry. In a way she was relieved, the last thing she needed was another of the witches to be in love with Harry, she already had the Weasley girl to deal with.

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Meanwhile, the teachers and Order members that were also dining at the school that evening were watching the dramatics surreptitiously, privately all of them were fascinated by the new twists and turns in a story that was only just becoming apparent to them all. At the far end of the table, Moody turned back to Kingsley and Dewpond, all of which had watched the muggle girl stride back out of the hall, satisfied look on her face.

"She certainly is a quick worker," Kingsley said lightly, as if testing everyone's reactions.

"Manipulative I'd call it," Moody growled, magical eye following the girl down the corridor, "I've seen it over and over, she's seeking out allegiances now - she's already got Tonks and Lupin on her side."

"I noticed," Kingsley replied, "do you really think she's playing us?"

"Why do you think she hasn't given her evidence to the Department yet?" Moody suggested with a disapproving sniff, "She knows it's her last bargaining card."

"That's very cynical of you," suggested Dewpond, who had only recently been informed of the situation with the boy the papers had been toting as The Chosen One for the past month and a half.

"She's a very cynical girl," he growled, "this situation is extremely dangerous...potentially damaging..."

There was a subtle shift in the air around the three, as if something that had previously been spoken about and deemed to dangerous to utter aloud was now being discussed.

"I take it that the protocol still stands?" Kingsley said cryptically.

"Yes. It does," replied Moody in a flat voice.

"There's going to be trouble," Dewpond said ominously.

"How did they think this was going to end? Happily ever after?" demanded Moody gruffly, "We're at war now."

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AN/ Hope you like it, and once again I'll administer the usual apology for lateness. I have been très busy at the moment looking for a job and everything! However I was actually working hard on this, you won't believe how hard it was to reunite Harry and Kitty believably (as Manuel well knows!).

As usual, please review, I do like to hear your views and suggestions! Plus, it's nice to read so many saying 'I don't usually like OC characters but yours grabbed me!', glad you like Kitty as much as me and Harry do!

## Chapter Twenty-Seven

So far away I wish you were here,  
Before it's too late this could all disappear,  
Before the doors close, this comes to an end,  
But with you by my side I will fight and defend .

The sound of Tonks apparating to the top of a large, wild looking hill was completely drowned out by the sound of wind howling across the landscape, whipping up bits of leaves, bracken, and Tonks' strawberry red hair. After steadying herself and pushing her hair out of her eyes, she immediately caught sight of her destination, Firelight House, lodged down in a more sheltered valley and surrounded by windswept looking trees. Grasping the package she was carrying to her chest, she immediately set off at a brisk walk, which soon became a jog as the steep sides of the hill gave way to a sharper incline than she'd been expecting.

By the time she reached the porch of building, her boots and Auror robes were filthy with mud, and her hair appeared to be developing its own personality and independent life. After grasping the cold copper of the doorknocker shaped as a ring being held in a wolf's mouth and rapping it a few times, she stood back and studied the house. It had the air of a once magnificent country house, which had long since fallen into shabbiness and disrepair, the ivy that had once clad its surface was now dead and brown.

After nearly three full minutes, the door suddenly opened to reveal a stooped, pale looking old man fighting to keep a hold of the frame before it blew off the hinges.

"Um...Yes?" he asked quickly, stumbling slightly as a sudden gust took him unawares.

"Wotcher, my name's Tonks," she said, giving him a bright smile.

“Um yes? You’re an, um, an Auror,” he stated, taking in her official robes with a mistrustful eye, before lingering in puzzlement at her outrageous hair colour.

“So I am,” she exclaimed in mock surprise, glancing down at her robes too, “do you mind if I come in before I end up being blown half way across this moor.”

“Um...” began the man, casting a nervous glance behind him for a moment, “Um...yes...of course...”

Tonks strode past him and waited for him to pull the door shut against the wind. In the mean time she glanced around the entrance hall - it was a reflection of the exterior of the house, obviously once magnificently furnished, now looked dull and neglected.

“So, ah, Tonks,” he began, looking unsure, “what, um what can I do for you?”

She wondered if his stuttering turn of speech was a habit of his, or whether she really did frighten him this much.

“I’m not here on official business, if that’s what you’re worried about Mr. Firelight,” she said kindly, taking pity of him.

“ Oh...well...of course I’m happy to hear that,” he blustered, ushering her towards what seemed to be the kitchen, before adding hastily, “not that I have, um, anything to hide from the Ministry, of-of course.”

“Of course Mr Firelight,” she said brightly, emerging into a room filled with cauldrons of all sizes bubbling away in various states of concoction.

“I’m just...um...” he began, helplessly motioning to the suspicious amount of cauldrons, “um...cooking.”

Tonks merely raised an eyebrow, and stirred the nearest cauldron, inhaling deeply the scent.

“I sincerely hope you don’t eat Sleeping Potion for dinner Mr. Firelight,” she began, before walking around the room with interest, “or Drought of Living Death, or-”

And she paused to deeply inhale a beautiful shimmering potion that smelled of old parchment, the great outdoors and a hint of Firewhiskey.

“-or Love Potion?” she finished with a grin, turning to the old man.

“I um...have all the proper licences...I’m um, a member of the Guild of Apothecaries and Potioneers!” he practically squeaked, running over to a corner to fetch a handful of papers and certificates, “see!”

“Don’t worry, Mr. Firelight!” she exclaimed, laughing at his anxiety, “I’ve already told you I’m not here on official business.”

“Um...ok?” he asked, parchments falling limply to his side as he gazed at her in desperation, “well um what do you want, um Miss?”

Tonks had walked over to the smallest cauldron that had been tucked out of the way from the others. One sniff was enough to tell her what it was and she gave him a smile.

“I’m here to visit one of your, ah, guests,” she said, wondering if his stammering was contagious.

“Guests?” he squeaked in an even higher voice, staring at the potion she was standing next to with a look of terror on his face, “I don’t um, don’t know what you mean?”

She gave a sigh, before looking down and carefully unpinning her Aurors badge that detailed her name, rank and profession and slipping it inside her pocket.

“This is unofficial Mr. Firelight, remember?” she said quietly, “I know what you do here and you must believe me when I tell you that there’s no way on earth I’d ever consider telling anyone else.”

“But um, how did you know?” he wailed pitifully, wringing his hands, “I’ve always demanded secrecy from my...my ah, guests.”

“I know Mr. Firelight,” she said, feeling incredibly sorry for him now, “but you have someone here whom I love, and I’m desperate to see him...make sure he’s ok?”

The man took one look at her face and realised she was telling the truth, that she wasn’t here to raid or report him. He gave a sigh and with a heavy nod beckoned her to follow him, lifting a set of heavy iron keys from a peg by the door and leading her to a similarly heavy set of iron doors. With a clanking sound he opened these up, before waving his wand with a complicated twirl and muttered charm.

They entered a steep set of stone steps within a brick lined corridor. Mr. Firelight preceded to lock the doors back up behind him and Tonks got a quick glimpse of solid silver plating upon the inside of them before he ushered her on, flaming torch in hand.

“How long have you been doing this?” she asked him curiously, voice lowered to a hushed whisper unconsciously.

“Um...nearly thirty years now I should say,” he said, sounding reticent to give her any details, “it began as accommodation and now...well...now its more...care.”

“And how many come?” she asked curiously, still unable to rise her voice above a whisper, the place felt like a morgue.

“It varies...” the old man replied, also whispering, “um twenty, twenty-five on average. Sometimes um more, sometimes less.”

They emerged into a large cellar, obviously magically enlarged and full of heavy iron cages that were dotted about the place in a seemingly random order. Again Tonks caught sight of the flash of silver plating in various places - stepping stones built into the floor, surrounding the massive locks on every cage and smaller pieces hanging from the ceiling on string.



However it was not the silver or the cages that drew her attention, but the huddled shapes within them, swathed in heavy blankets or robes. Tonks couldn't help but peer into the first cage they passed, finding a gaunt looking man lying on a small, torn mattress, travelling cloak pulled tight around him. It was the same case in the next cage, the next held a young woman, and in the fourth, the occupant was awake, lying with his back against the wall and staring blankly in front of him.

He looked the very picture of pain and suffering and Tonks didn't think she'd ever seen a more depressing, heart wrenching sight in all her life. Suddenly, she didn't think this visit was a good idea.

"Don't worry," said the man suddenly, misinterpreting her expression, "the full moon is over, they're um, just sleeping it off..."

She glanced around at the sleeping huddled figures and felt her insides chill, freezing her to the very bone. Even this place, an illegal sanctuary for werewolves to transform in comfort and safety, was as oppressive and dismal as a prison. The official accommodation was so much worse, befitting Dolores Umbridge's guidelines of half-breed quarantine, it was little wonder only a few people handed themselves over to the ministry for proper lunar supervision.

"So, um, who are you here to visit?" asked the man, motioning with the torch to the other twenty odd cages.

Tonks swallowed heavily, revolted at herself for the sudden urge to flee far away from this dank, depressing place. It was like Azkaban all over again, as if Dementors were invading the very walls - but this atmosphere was not caused by magical creatures, only the pain and misery of abandoned humans suffering.

"Um...Miss?" he prompted, "Miss Tonks?"

"Sorry," she said quickly, mentally shaking herself and drawing the package closer to her, "I'm here to see Remus Lupin."

He squinted at her in the gloom for a moment as if debating something within his own mind, before give a nervous cough.

“I’m um...I’m afraid that’s not possible...” he stuttered.

“What? Why?” she demanded swiftly, glaring down at the man.

“Well...um...”

“What?” she prompted even louder, “What’s happened?”

“Well...um...Mr. Lupin didn’t come this month,” he said in a rush, “I didn’t hear from him but I assumed he had arranged other accommodation for his transformation - he sometime does.

Tonks practically felt her heart stop for a moment as the man’s trembling words entered her mind.

“He...he didn’t come?” she whispered in dread.

“Um...no...” he said apologetically, twisting his hands again now.

“But...why not...” she demanded faintly, feeling suddenly very sick, “he always comes here...”

“I know,” the man said hastily, “he normally does! But I thought...in these dark times, perhaps something untoward had happened...”

“What do you mean by that?” snapped Tonks suddenly, her anger surprising herself as much as the old man, “You think he’s gone running off to join You-Know-Who?”

“No Miss!” he said at once in distress, “Of course not! Mr Lupin is a good man...but I’ve seen the numbers of guests here drop by nearly half these past few months alone! I um, I regret some may have joined Him, some may just have been unfortunate to stand against Him...”

“But...but Remus wouldn't miss his appointment!” she said, feeling the anxiety building second by second, “He wouldn't! He told me he was coming straight here! Just after he-”

And Tonks stopped mid sentence. A sudden, horrible thought had occurred to her. She narrowed her eyes furiously as she went over the facts.

“Thank you Mr. Firelight,” she said in a low voice, “you've been most helpful. Keep up the good work.”

“No problem Mi-” he began, but a sudden resounding crack was all that was left of Tonks' presence as she apparated from the house.

Meanwhile, some 500 miles away, Tonks was storming into Grimmauld Place. She sent the trolls leg umbrella stand flying, set off Mrs Black and tripped over the corner of the carpet before she stormed into the kitchen to find exactly who she was looking for.

“You!” she snarled, striding over to the table where Bill and Charlie were seated.

They both looked up to her in obvious surprise.

“Where is he?” she hissed, hands on hips.

She knew she'd struck gold when Bills expression flickered for a moment and Charlie's neck displayed the creeping blush of a Weasley in discomfort.

“Where's who little sis?” Bill asked calmly, faint look of puzzlement adding a nice little touch to the mask of deceit.

“You know who I'm talking about William Arthur Weasley!” she stormed, “Don't you dare play the innocent with me!”

“Tonks,” began Charlie in surprise, obviously appealing for calm.

“And you can shut the fuck up!” she roared, whipping around towards Charlie instantly, who looked dumbfounded, “Now you tell me right now where he is!”

“He’s at Firelight House Tonks,” Bill said, not smiling anymore and eying her warily, “where he is every month, you know that.”

“He is NOT!” she shouted, throwing the package she’d so lovingly prepared and carried onto the table.

It landed with a dull, wet thwack and both the men grimaced at the splatter of blood it left, leaking out from the waxed brown paper as the unmistakable smell of fresh meat filled the air.

“Well if he’s not, I don’t know why-” began Bill innocently before Tonks gave a roar of frustration.

In what seemed like a millisecond, Tonks had launched herself at Bill pushing him backwards out of his chair until she was straddling over him on the floor, wand pushed into his throat.

“Tell me where he is,” she hissed furiously.

Meanwhile Charlie had jumped up with a shout and Bill was staring at Tonks with unmistakeable fear.

“Let him go Tonks!” Charlie demanded, hovering between anger and fear himself unsure whether to drag her off his brother and risk being cursed himself.

“Tonks-,” spluttered Bill, going red in a face at her grip as the wand pressed in deeper.

“Slightly illegal he said,” Tonks spat, feeling the hardly contained hysteria building within her, “What does that mean? What did you let him do? Where is he?”

“Tonks-” Bill merely choked, going a funny shade of purple now.

“Tonks!” shouted Charlie, before grabbing her under the arms and bodily hoisting her off Bill.

She yelled and fought against him, feeling her foot connect with something before he gave an ‘oof’ and released her. Tonks scrambled to her feet, wand already trained on the two brothers. Bill was still lying on the floor, coughing and rubbing his sore neck whilst Charlie was similarly sprawled out next to him, wheezing quietly.

“What is wrong with you?” demanded Bill finally, sounding angry, “You could have choked me!”

“I still will Weasley if you don’t give me some answers!” she spat, “Where’s Remus?”

“He’s at another safe house,” Bill replied grouchy, still rubbing his neck.

“Why?” she yelled, jerking her wand towards him aggressively.

“Stop threatening us with your wand first!” he snapped back, losing his temper now, “For Merlin’s Sake Tonks! This is us! You’re not on duty now!”

Grudgingly she had to admit they were right and if she hexed them seven ways till Sunday she’d probably be suspended. She lowered it slightly, but increased the anger in her glare.

“Why is he using a different safe house?” she asked, attempting to keep her voice calm and steady but failing miserably.

“Because,” he said with a sigh, “they offered him something Firelight couldn’t.”

“What?” she demanded, “Firelight has a secure room, Wolfsbane, healing potions - what more could he need?!”

“A cure,” Bill supplied quietly.

Tonks felt her stomach flip over suddenly and she stared at Bill for a good few moments.

“What...? Is there a...” she whispered, daring not to hope, dream, believe, “there’s a...cure?”

“No,” he said, shaking his head sadly, “not yet anyway...but Remus is testing a new potion.”

She felt like she’d just been punched in the gut, completely winded beyond recovery. Tonks didn’t know which was worse; the fact that for a brief moment she’d felt as if all her dreams had come true, that Remus could be cured, that he would be free of his terrible enslavement; or the fact that Remus was out there now, testing potions.

“What...what kind of potion?” she whispered, feeling suddenly very light-headed.

“An alternative to Wolfsbane, one that could suppress the wolf altogether, if it worked,” he said, hesitantly climbing to his feet.

“And...and does it?” she demanded faintly.

“We don’t know yet...” Bill said, glancing at Charlie as if silently communicating something, “the potion is brand new and the trials will probably be going for a long time before it becomes public, if it works of course.”

Tonks lowered herself onto a chair she’d conjured, suddenly feeling very tired and drained. Her time in St Mungo’s and her injuries, which hadn’t really affected her this morning, were suddenly back with a vengeance and demanding attention.

“Why...why didn’t he tell me?” she asked, horribly aware of how childish she sounded right at that moment - scared and alone.

“He didn’t want you to worry, little sis,” Bill told her gently, crouching down in front of her now, “there’s a strong possibility it won’t work at all, or that it might make it worse instead of better...”

“But...how could he do it!” she demanded, horrified to feel tears springing to her eyes, “If he’s going to get hurt, why do it...?”

“ Because, volunteers get 100 galleons for taking part in an experiment not sanctioned and deemed illegal by the Ministry of Magic.”

Tonks took a deep shuddering breath but it could not dispel the horror of finding out that it was all her fault...Remus had taken part in this, this, human experiment, because of her idiocy with money, because she wouldn’t take his advice and just ask for help, because of her. She couldn’t help but begin to sob, unable to stop herself imagining all the terrible things that could happen to someone taking a new, untested potion in some shady, backstreet safe house.

The best that could happen would be a fully fledged werewolf transformation, the kind he’d experienced when he was younger, fitter, and not softened by prolonged use of Wolfsbane.

Bill pulled her forward into a tight embrace whilst Charlie stared at Tonks, grimacing and clenching his fists tightly. She sobbed into his shoulder, feeling utterly miserable.

“It’s all my fault...” she gasped, holding tightly onto his robes, “If he’s hurt...Bill...if he’s hurt-”

“Sssh,” he whispered consolingly, “don’t worry about it until you have too, Remus is strong. He’ll be just fine.”

“But I love him Bill,” she choked out in a tortured voice.

“I know little sis, I know.”

She drew in a shuddering breath, trying to get her emotions under control. The last month had been so hard, so much had happened,

and finally Remus had been her light at the end of the tunnel. And now Bill was telling her that he could be, what? Hurt? Sick? Dead?

She blanched at the thought.

“He’s not dead,” she whispered feeling sick, “I’d know if he was, and he’s not.”

“Of course he’s not,” Bill told her firmly, “and he’ll be back soon before you know it.”

“What if he can’t...” she began, gulping fiercely as her voice shook, “What if he’s too tired to get back?”

“I’m going to get him,” replied Bill calmly.

“I’m coming with you!” she said at once, standing up quickly.

“No, it’s too risky. If you were found out soliciting places like this you’ll be fired,” Bill told her as she mouthed at him angrily, “and you can’t afford to loose your job now Tonks.”

She glared at Bill fiercely, but knew he was speaking sense, of course she couldn’t afford to loose her job now.

“I’ll disguise myself,” she tried.

“Tonks, you’re an Auror,” Bill said flatly, “do you really think a disguise will work?”

She felt her shoulders sag, what could she do?

“I’ll go with him Tonks,” Charlie said suddenly, finally speaking up from his silence vigil over the two.

Both Bill and Tonks looked over to him in surprise. It was no secret between anyone about Charlie’s feeling towards Remus and Tonks, so this must have taken him a great deal to do this.



“Thank you Charlie,” Tonks whispered laying a hand on his arm for a moment.

“We’ll that’s sorted, we’ll go and get him,” Bill said, gathering his travelling cloak up, before turning on Tonks, “and you! You should get back into bed, you’re still ill!”

“Ok,” she said in a small voice, anxiety twisting her stomach “how long will you be?”

“Depends,” shrugged Bill as he and Charlie headed over to the fireplace.

“On what?!” she asked desperately, but the only answer she met was the sudden flash of green flame as they flooded away.

“Vampires?”

“Yep.”

“Mummies?”

“Yep.”

“Werewolves are a given of course...how about Big Foot?”

“There’s Yeti’s in Tibet.”

“Wow really? Cool...how about dragons?”

“Which species?”

“There’s more than one?”

“I’ve flown against a Hungarian Horntail.”

“Really?!”

“Yeah.”

“Er...Why?”

“Long story, I’ll tell you some time.”

“Tooth fairy?”

“ No...but we’ve got Cornish pixies, Doxy’s, Imps, Leprechauns...erm, what else...”

“I get the picture. Wee little fairies of all sorts, just none that have a tooth fetish?”

“Something like that.”

“Easter Bunny?”

“Nope.”

“How about...Father Christmas?”

“Yeah, of course.”

Kitty stopped ticking her fingers off at once, staring at Harry with the utmost look of shock on her face.

“Seriously?” she asked with incredulity.

“Yeah,” shrugged Harry nonchalantly, “where do you think all the mince pies and carrots go?”

Kitty silently gaped for a moment.

“I’ve met him,” Harry added, “very jolly, although I always expected him to have a Norwegian accent for some reason.”

“Really?” she gasped, as Harry struggled to stop the laughter that was welling up inside him at the expression on Kitty’s face.

“You can meet him if you want,” he began, before his shoulders began to shake silently, “I’m sure he’ll get you that dolly you always asked for...”

Kitty’s eyes snapped into a glare instantly as Harry broke into wild laughter, slapping the bedclothes as he gasped for air - comment such as ‘priceless’ and ‘the look on your face’ featured heavily in his splutters.

“Oh yeah, you’re so funny,” she sneered, arms crossed as she leant back in her seat, looking unimpressed.

“Oh come on!” he laughed, “Father Christmas? I mean, seriously! Did you really believe me?”

“No, of course not,” she scoffed, trying to cover her obvious embarrassment, “and I suppose vampires and dragons aren’t real either?”

“Oh no, they are,” Harry countered, grinning now.

She narrowed her eyes suspiciously, “I don’t believe you.”

“Cross my heart, hope to die,” he promised.

“Scouts honour?” she smirked, settling back in her seat again and studying him carefully, “Seriously now, which are real and which aren’t?”

“Ok, basically...anything that’s been a legend, myth or a fairytale is real, and anything that’s imaginary isn’t.”

“But I thought everything was imaginary, so that doesn’t help.”

“You know what I mean - cultural things like Father Christmas, the Easter Bunny, Jack Frost...”

Kitty frowned, obviously thinking this over and Harry grinned once again.

“There’s gonna be exceptions though...basically, take anything you’ve heard about in muggle stories, especially if it’s Medieval, and you’re half way there.”

“So, mermaids yes, Ginger bread man no?” she tried tentatively.

“Bingo! Ten points to the house of Kitty,” Harry said, noticing Ron and his brothers entering the Hospital Wing.

“How about, yes to unicorns, no to...Guy Fawkes.”

“He was a real person,” Harry pointed out.

“Oh yeah,” she said thoughtfully, before looking a little sheepish, “oops forgot. God, no wonder I failed history...”

Harry however wasn’t quite listening. He’d noticed the Weasley’s sudden reluctance to come right over and he waved to them encouragingly. Ron gave a slight waved back and he, Fred and George began to walk over as Kitty rambled on oblivious.

“So where does Humpty Dumpty fit in to all of this?” she demanded suddenly, “any species of giant egg-people prone to falling off walls?”

“No, but I’ve got a good hex if you’ve got someone in mind,” came the answer and Kitty swivelled around to see the three standing at the foot of the bed.

“Hey guys,” Harry greeted them as they fanned out around the bed and secured themselves seats.

“Alright Harry,” George said in a breezy tone, sitting down next to Kitty, who had suddenly gone silent, “so, what’s all this about?”

“Magical education,” Harry said grinning as Kitty shot him an awkward look, “first lesson creatures.”

“Ah,” he replied, leaning back in his chair, “tricky subject, best way to go about it is to just believe anything.”

“I wouldn’t believe everything he says,” Kitty replied, arched eyebrow raised as she looked at Harry, who merely smirked.

“Tut tut Harry. You’re not confusing the poor girl are you?” Fred asked, propping his feet up on Harry’s bed.

“I’d say she was confused enough to be going out with this sorry excuse,” George added, nodding in Harry’s direction.

“Ha, she’s highly honoured,” Harry replied easily to which Kitty merely snorted.

“Dream on superboy,” she stated, “we all know who’s the trousers and the brains of this outfit!”

“Oh really?” he asked her pointedly, “spoken to Santa lately?”

She merely smirked at him and settled back in her seat. Harry was glad that Kitty got on well with the guys and that things seemed to be back to normal between them - or at least whatever counted as normal these days. When he tuned back in, she was chatting with the twins animatedly, who were sharing secretive, surprised look between each other every now and then. He watched them for a moment, before noticing that Ron hadn’t even spoken yet and looked quite preoccupied.

“What’s up?” he asked quietly, frowning lightly at his friend.

After a moment Ron looked up in surprise, "Sorry mate, I was miles away..."

"Bad news or something?" he asked anxiously.

"There's always bad news these days," he said, shrugging slightly, "but nothing we have to worry about - just thinking..."

Harry stared at him for a moment, feeling that Ron was acting rather strange and not at all like himself. Since when did Ron let the news really upset him - or slip into pensive moods? He was about to question him further when he overheard what Kitty was talking to the twins about.

"So Harry decides to take me out clubbing right? To this big nightclub in the centre of the city and makes me promise to be on my best behaviour," she was saying as they grinned appreciatively.

"I don't think we need to talk about that do we?" Harry suggested hastily.

"Oh we do," said George.

"Pray continue," added Fred.

"Well, I was perfectly well behaved," she began before Harry rolled his eyes, "and Harry here decides to go knight in shining armour on me and take offence to these guys who thought my arse was public property and starts a fight."

"Really?" asked Fred with interest, looking delighted.

"And what happened?" asked George, smirking at Harry who was glaring meaningfully at Kitty.

"He was actually quite impressive, weren't you dear?" she asked in a simpering tone, patting his hand, "came off the better of the group. Had these massive black eyes though, made him look like a panda!"

“Ha ha,” smirked Harry, “I seem to recall you tried to join the fray too.”

“Yup,” she said happily, “Although, I think you had it covered - you should have seen in, right little Rocky, though I felt I’d have to wash his mouth out with soap - disgraceful language.”

All three of them began to laugh at them and Harry merely nodded along with it, unable to help smiling slightly as he remembered the night.

“It was the anger talking,” he added.

“I think it was Jack Daniels doing the talking actually,” Kitty laughed, “either that or Mr. Smirnov!”

“Laugh all you want,” Harry said to her happily, “I don’t think it was me who demanded that a bath was a perfectly suitable bed for the night!”

“Oh yeah!” she exclaimed happily as the Twins burst out laughing once again, “Forgot about that - how could you let me sleep in a bath?!”

“I seem to recall you threatened me in aggressive tones,” he retorted, poking his tongue out at her as she rolled her eyes.

“Aggressive tones,” she laughed, “moi?”

“I think you’re exact words were ‘piss off Harry or you’ll be the first person in the world to find out what castration by curling tongues feels like. They’re muggle hair curlers, by the way.’”

After a moment of shocked silence from all concerned they burst into wild laughter, Kitty looking almost as shocked at her words as the Twins were. Even Ron, who hadn’t seemed to be following the conversation couldn’t help but laugh and for a moment, Harry delighted in the sudden and overwhelming feeling of happiness he

felt. The past few months seemed to melt in a way that up until now, only being with Kitty seemed to manage.

“Sounds like you’re both as mad as each other,” George pointed out finally and Harry looked at him curiously for a moment.

He deflated slightly, here was another reference to his running away being caused by, what was it Ron had said yesterday, losing touch with reality? He didn’t know why, but it made him angry.

“Don’t tell me you’re another one who thinks I’ve gone barmy?” he asked in light tones although almost instantly he saw Kitty shoot him a look.

“Mate, I always thought you were mad,” George replied in mock seriousness.

The moment of tenseness passed, but the conversation seemed to leave the sunny shores it had been enjoying up until then. Harry felt Kitty slip her hand into his after a moment and he glanced over to her to see a questioning look in her eyes - he hadn’t told her what Ron and Hermione had said yet.

“So,” began Harry, casting around for a new conversation, “what have you guys been up to?”

And then the conversation started once more. The Twins were bursting with enthusiasm for their new shop on Diagon Alley and at once launched into a detailed description of their stock, how trade was faring, hiring employees and invited them all to come for a visit once Harry was feeling better. Kitty was immediately interested in the shop and the Twins promised to show her some of their produce. Harry made a mental note to forewarn Kitty about the danger of anything the twins possessed.

It was only when Fred recounted an amusing incident involving Hermione suffering an irremovable black eye from a punching telescope that had occurred a few weeks before, that Harry noticed her absence.



“Speaking of Hermione - where is she?” he queried, thinking it strange she hadn’t come today with the Weasley’s when she was staying with them.

“She er, decided to stay back with Ginny and help mum with stuff at Grimauld Place,” Ron told him and Harry frowned.

He didn’t seem to be the only person who thought this was strange because he noticed Kitty shift slightly and fix Ron with a calculating look.

“Really?” he asked, looking over at Fred and George questioningly, “why?”

“There’s some extra people staying and stuff,” Ron replied cagily.

“Why?” Harry repeated, knowing now something had happened that they weren’t telling him.

“Big attack last night,” Fred said, tone sounding empty of the former jokiness enjoyed only a few minutes ago.

Kitty sat up a little straighter and shot Harry a look of alarm. He understood immediately what she was thinking, here was the proof that Voldemort has indeed not been hurt by Kitty’s attack.

“Voldemort?” he asked, ignoring the flinches that came from everyone save him and Kitty.

“Not in the flesh, so to speak,” George replied and Harry saw Kitty literally sag with relief, “Death Eaters...they got Emmeline Vance.”

“No!” Harry exclaimed, “How?”

“Killing curse,” Ron shrugged, “whilst on duty for the Order - we’re not really sure of the details yet.”

They were all silent for a moment and Harry felt Kitty give his hand a brief, comforting squeeze.

“That’s horrible,” Harry said finally, he remembered vividly meeting the stately looking witch only a year before when he’d first travelled to Grimauld Place.

“That’s not the half of it,” Fred informed him wearily, “since you’ve been gone there’s been all sorts of things happening...”

And they preceded to fill Harry in on the past month events - an attack on a small village in the West Country not far from Ottery St Catchpole by giants, the murder of Amelia Bones, disappearances, breakouts from Azkaban, Dementor attacks...

“And I’ve lost count of the number of muggle attacks and murders,” George finished heavily, “there was a really nasty one in Manchester only a few weeks ago that got the Order really upset.”

“Manchester?” Kitty demanded suddenly, looking over to the Twins.

Harry’s heart stopped. The details trickled back to him - Kitty’s step brother, his dream, the one Kitty had shared and confided to him. He felt her grip on his hand suddenly double.

“Yeah,” Fred was saying, completely oblivious, “just some normal guy and his friend or something, I think they were tortured before being killed - Tonks was there, she got seriously hurt herself, ended up in St Mungo’s. It was Bellatrix Lestranger who did it.”

This time it was Harry’s turn to redouble his grip on Kitty’s hand - Bellatrix. He should have known...Harry turned to look at Kitty, but she was staring hard at the Twins, face a complete blank slate - she’d surely made the connection, she’d known as soon as they’d said Manchester.

“So...he was tortured?” she asked them finally, voice sounding a little higher than normal, “what for?”

She already knew. It was because they were supposed to have been there. Kitty was supposed to have taken Harry to her family. Bellatrix was just looking for them. For him.

"Nobody knows, guess he was just in the wrong place at the wrong time."

"That's not right," she snapped back, "there must have been a reason."

Fred and George looked surprised for a moment at her tone and Harry tried to silently convey to them to stop the conversation.

"These guys don't need a reason," shrugged Fred.

"There's always a reason," she replied, dragging her hand out of Harry's and sitting back in her seat, arms folded, "right Harry?"

She was staring at him challengingly and he couldn't think of a thing to say. After a few tense moments of silence, she jumped to her feet suddenly.

"I think I'll go have a fag," she announced, striding towards the door.

"Kitty, wait!" Harry tried, but she merely waved over her shoulder impatiently and left the Hospital Wing.

"What was all that about?" the Twins asked in unison as they turned back to Harry.

He gave a heavy sigh rubbing his eyes with his fingers and pinching the bridge of his nose.

"That was her brother - the muggle," he told them, "well, her step-brother."

All three of them cursed under their breath.

"Sorry, we didn't know," George said, looking alarmed.

“Neither did she,” he replied in a far off voice, wishing with all his might he could go after her and find her, explain everything.

But right now he hardly had the strength to sit up; even the thought of walking or just standing filled him with exhaustion.

“Were they looking for you then?” Ron asked, looking worriedly towards the door.

“Obviously,” he replied.

“Sorry mate,” George apologised, looking uncomfortable at Kitty’s exit, “we wouldn’t have said anything, if we’d known.”

Harry nodded, of course they wouldn’t, but still...he’d forgotten about her brother. His stomach gave a sickening twist at this thought as he cursed himself for how easily he forget that he’d caused someone else death.

Kitty stared impassively ahead as she smoked, mechanically bringing the cigarette up to her lips, before blowing the bluish smoke up into the air, watching it swirl away in the decidedly autumnal breeze. She didn’t really know why she felt so shocked - she’d known her step brother had been dead, murdered even, for some time now. But the knowledge that it was directly related to her, and Harry, made her feel suddenly guilty. Sure, he hadn’t been such a nice guy, and sure, he’d never been particularly brotherly to her, but it was still...sad.

She was just probing her feelings deeper when she felt a presence behind her and she whipped around instantly. She stared in surprise at the person standing behind her, who looked grim, although the red tinge to his ears told her he was a little nervous too.

“Hi Cathy,” Ron said, leaning against the wall Kitty was sitting on and pretending to enjoy the view too.

“Hi,” she replied, feeling a mixture of curiosity and long-held annoyance.

He seemed at a loss to say for a moment so Kitty lit herself another cigarette. After a moment she became aware that Ron was watching her smoke curiously. Wordlessly she offered him one, but he merely shook his head and looked back across the view.

“So...” she prompted.

“Just thought I’d come a see if you were ok,” he said after a moment, “Harry told us about your brother.”

“Step brother,” she corrected him unconsciously.

“Yeah, sorry,” he said hastily, “So...are you? Alright I mean?”

“Fantastic,” she said dryly, before giving him a shrug, “it’s no problem, honest, just felt like having a little space - magic makes me a bit claustrophobic sometimes.”

“I can imagine,” he replied, looking as though he really couldn’t.

She watched him for a moment, curiously.

“You know,” she said conversationally, “when I said we had to pretend to get on really well, that was just when we’re around Harry.”

Ron looked a little shocked at her direct line of questioning, before giving a rueful little smile.

“I know,” he said, before hoisting himself up onto the wall next to her, “but I thought I’d just tell you that I don’t really have a problem with you, seeing as the opportunities just arisen.”

Kitty looked at him for moment, her turn to be shocked now.

“Is that code for ‘while Hermione’s not here?’” she guessed, giving a laugh at Ron’s guilty expression, “yeah well, that’s ok, I know a lost cause when I see one. For what it’s worth, I don’t particularly have a problem with you either.”

Ron looked rather pleased at this and for a couple of moments they sat, lingering silence as they both perhaps realised this was the first time they'd spoken to each other civilly since they met.

"Fred and George like you too," he said, as if trying to think of something to fill the silence.

"Oh," she said unable to hide her surprise, "That wasn't all an act then?"

"No, they're always like that," he laughed, before silent again.

They both stared at the view for a few moments as Kitty processed this information - it was quite flattering really to think about the amount of people who had changed their opinion of her since she'd arrived here. Admittedly, most of them were only like this because he'd figured out what was wrong with Harry, but still - it was a start.

"Harry's looking better, isn't he?" she said to him, deciding to appeal to the common denominator.

"Yeah definitely," he said happily, "for a while there I thought...well, you know."

Kitty nodded in silent agreement, there had been times when she too, had feared the worst. Usually, in the dark of night, when the nightmares came.

"Being beaten up must suit him," she said with a slight laugh, "I don't think I can remember what he looks like without cuts and bruises now."

"Yeah well, my dad was telling me that muggles can't treat their injuries and have to leave them to heal on their own!" Ron exclaimed, managing to look highly amused and bewildered at the same time.

Kitty, who could have taken offence at this, merely laughed, she supposed to them, muggles were just as strange as they were to her.

“Weird, isn’t it,” she said in a faraway voice, “that you could go your whole life without ever realising that all this stuff exists - magic and weird creatures and wars...”

“Weird that you could live your life never having met or spoken to a muggle,” Ron countered, looking at her curiously.

“I’m the first muggle you’ve ever spoken to?” she asked him in surprise.

“Well Hermione and Harry don’t count, they were brought up muggle, but they’re not, so...yeah I guess you are.”

“Bet I haven’t made a good impression,” she said with a slight grin, “bet you think we’re all hysterical maniacs now.”

“Only slightly mad,” he laughed with her, “but despite what Hermione might say and do sometimes...I kind of understand why you’ve been like that - I guess we were a bit too wrapped up in ourselves to think about it.”

Kitty nodded, “Ditto.”

After a moment she suddenly remembered something odd Harry had said earlier.

“Does everything think Harry’s gone mad or something?” she asked frowning, “He asked your brother earlier about it, I thought it sounded weird at the time.”

“Not mad, no,” Ron said hastily before pausing, obviously searching for the right words, “everyone reckons he’s a little...detached.”

“Detached?” she asked, eyebrow raised, “What’s that supposed to mean?”

“ Well, after everything that happened at the ministry...Sirius dying...” he explained, looking slightly pained, “among other things...It’s not really surprising, is it?”

“I don’t understand,” she said slowly, “what other things? What happened at the Ministry?”

“We we’re in a dual there, that’s where Sirius died...He hasn’t said anything to you about it?” he asked, looking crestfallen, “Hermione and me thought maybe he’d tell you about what happened...about the Prophecy?”

Kitty felt the hairs on the back of her neck raise - this didn’t sound good.

“Prophecy?” she asked cautiously, “As in the Nostradamus, end-of-the-world, Armageddon type prophecies?”

“No,” he said hastily, “thing is, we don’t know what the prophecy was about. We went to the ministry because we thought Sirius had been kidnapped and kept there, but it turned out to be a lure by You-know-Who. He wanted Harry to get a prophecy from the Ministry. We think it must be about Harry and You-Know-Who.”

Kitty gaped at Ron, unable to really think of everything to say. Although she’d seen Harry surrounded by magic for weeks now, even seen him dual against Tom Riddle, she felt like Ron was talking about someone completely different.

“Did he...did he get it?” she asked breathlessly.

“Yeah, he did, but he told us it smashed before he heard it...” Ron said, looking at Kitty as if he was desperate for her to correct him, to have new information.

“But you don’t believe him?” Kitty observed, her mind already reeling with possibilities, “You think he heard it?”



“Why else would he run away?” Ron said, almost excited that his theory seemed to make sense.

“Because he was upset about Sirius,” she guessed, fighting against the feeling of increasing dread, “because he was feeling guilty?”

“Or because he knows what’s going to happen,” Ron said urgently, “I’m not saying he’s not grieving for Sirius, or feeling guilty, although he shouldn’t be, but, I just don’t think that would make Harry want to leave. He loves the magical world.”

“Obviously not,” she snapped, feeling stung, why did they all assume their world was so much better than hers?

“I don’t mean anything against muggles,” he replied hastily, “it’s just that....Harry belongs here...I can’t think of anything that would make him want to leave it except this.”

“Knowing what’s going to happen?” she asked quietly.

“Exactly.”

“But you don’t actually believe that do you?” she burst out, “Prophecies and predictions and all that crap! It’s not real, is it!?”

Ron looked as if he didn’t know the answer to that question, but answered in an anxious voice, “If You-Know-Who believed it? And went to all those lengths to get it? Then it probably is.”

Kitty looked across the expansive view for a moment, trying to digest the information. She pulled a cigarette out and began to smoke, unpleasantly surprised to see her hands shaking.

“I don’t believe in destiny,” she said firmly.

“Don’t you?” Ron asked quietly.

“No!” she exclaimed, “You’re telling me there’s some grand design? Someone’s pulling the strings? That somewhere it’s written Harry has to fight this maniac? That somewhere someone decided exactly what’s going to happen?”

“I don’t know,” Ron shrugged, looking uneasy, “but if you knew everything...what’s happened to Harry...maybe it wouldn’t be so easy to brush aside the idea.”

“What do you mean?” Kitty asked suspiciously, “What happened to Harry?”

“This is something you’ll have to talk to him about,” Ron said hesitantly, “I’m just saying that Harry’s always been there, in the centre of things - You-know-Who wants him gone for a reason...I say that reasons the Prophecy and what it says.”

“And what do you think it says?”

“That in the end Harry will be the one to fight him,” Ron said, looking deadly serious and deathly pale at the thought.

“And he’ll win...won’t he?” Kitty pressed, unaware she was now whispering.

Ron looked at his hands for a moment before stoically nodding his head.

“I believe he can,” he said firmly, “I just don’t know if Harry does.”

Kitty was shocked to find that she had tears swimming into her eyes. She suddenly felt a new found sense of despair and sympathy for Harry. No wonder he wanted to run away, escape from everything, hide. If it had been her, if her life was magic and duels, evil wizards and prophecies, she’d want to do nothing more than to hide in a dark place and never leave.

But more than anything she’d want someone to be there with her, someone to take away the pain, to help.

“I have to go,” she said suddenly, jumping off the wall and hurrying back into the school.

When she strode back into the Hospital Wing, she found Harry still being entertained by the Twins, who appeared to be regaling him with a highly amusing story. He had, she noticed, a rather fixed smile on his face, she could practically see the cogs turning from where she stood. As she approached he caught sight of her and instantly the smile slid off his face as he regarded her with an anxious look. The Twins must have sensed they’d lost their audience because they also turned to watch her.

“Can I speak to Harry?” she asked them, slightly breathlessly.

“Er, sure,” said George, already rising from his seat.

“See you in a bit Harry,” Fred said, throwing a wave over his shoulder as they left.

Kitty moved around the bed and sat down on it next to Harry.

“Listen Kitty,” he began in a worried voice, “about your step-brother-”

“Harry,” she cut in, picking up his hand and grasping it tightly, “did you hear the prophecy?”

For a moment it seemed as if all sound and movement had been turned off as Harry stared at her.

“What?” he demanded incredulously, pulling his hand from hers in alarm.

“You heard me...when you told everyone it smashed...did you hear it?” she asked desperately.

“How did you know about that?” he asked, shifting nervously.

“Does it matter?” she demanded, “Did you? Did you hear it?”

Harry regarded her silently for a moment, seeming to be suffering some kind of internal struggle and she thought she knew why.

“Listen Harry,” she said in a low voice, leaning towards him “I know that this is weird, me knowing about all this stuff...about magic and everything...and that you never wanted us to be like this...but now I know, I might as well try and understand and help...don’ t you think?”

Harry frowned at her, “What do you mean, I never wanted us to be like this?”

“You didn’t want me to know about all this did you?” she replied, slightly surprised.

“I did,” he countered, “You know I was going to tell you everything that day! Why do you think I wouldn’t want us to be like this?”

It was Kitty’s turn to regard him silently, and after biting her lip thoughtfully, shrugged helplessly.

“I don’t know...”

Kitty knew that Harry understood exactly what she was talking about, that he had always tried to be ‘just Harry’ with her, that that was probably why they got together in the first place. She thought maybe a small part of Harry still wanted her to not know any of this; she’d noticed his reluctance to talk about anything to do with his new life in any great detail.

“Harry?” she asked him seriously, grasping his hand a little tighter, “Did you hear the prophecy?”

Harry looked into her eyes for a moment before sighing.

“Yes” he admitted quietly.

Kitty gulped audibly, feeling suddenly very sick.

“And...” she asked in a tremulous voice, “What did it say? Do you...Will you...?”

Again Harry looked into her eye and Kitty saw the fear and the guilt mingled with the sadness that always seemed to be lurking. He drew a shaky breath and began to recite something in a monotonous voice, as if to somehow deaden the effect of the words which were like physical blows to Kitty.

"The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches...

Born to those who have thrice defied him, born as the seventh month dies...

And the Dark Lord will mark him as his equal, but he will have power the Dark Lord knows not...

And either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives...

The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord will be born as the seventh month dies..."

Harry seemed to have no trouble in remembering the seer's words perfectly, then again Kitty guessed you'd tend to remember the prediction of your own doom in detail.

“What...” she began, struggling at where to start, how to sound, “I don't understand it...What does that mean...?”

“It means murder or be murdered,” he said flatly.

Kitty felt her breath hitch slightly and she doubled the grasp of Harry's hand.

“But...” she began, her mind reeling, “but it can't...”

She struggled to breathe properly, she felt like all the wind had been knocked clean out of her. She'd only just got Harry back, and now...the road stretched ahead of her, ominously dark and full of pain.

"I'm sorry Kitty," Harry said softly, and she looked up at once, pretending that the water in her eyes was not there, "it wasn't meant to be this way, was it?"

She shook her head, trying to reign in her emotions. Suddenly she felt the overwhelming desire to be closer to Harry; to take him, and hide him, and never let anyone find him. As if sensing this Harry ran his fingers down her cheek, smoothing away the braids and smiling faintly. Perhaps it was that that did it, that small smile, as if he'd just accepted what was going to happen and wasn't going to fight any more. It made something inside her snap, the old feeling of rebellion and defiance sprang to life once more.

"Hang on a second. It doesn't even say it's you!" she burst out at once, "that could mean a million different people!"

"I was born at the end of July Kitty," Harry said, in that same accepting tone - as if he'd already done this all this, heard all this before.

"Yeah well, so was I!" snapped Kitty, "So were hundreds of other people!"

"My parents defied Voldemort three times," Harry continued, and Kitty couldn't help but be angered by his lack of fight, why didn't he want the loophole?

"You're telling me they were the only people that stood up to him? Wasn't he in power for years?" she tried, "What did your parents do anyway? How did they defy him?"

"They-" began Harry, before falling silent and thinking about this, "I actually don't know how..."

“Well,” she said triumphantly, “How do you know they defied him? Or if they did it three times then?”

“Because,” Harry pressed, “Dumbledore told me.”

Kitty stopped pacing at once and looked at Harry. For a moment she couldn't understand why the name had shocked her so much, she felt the tingling sensation of déjà vu, as if someone had mentioned a long forgotten acquaintance. But almost as soon as it arose, the feeling faded into the murk of other emotions and she brushed it aside.

“So...say it is you...” she began gulping slightly, “that's alright...it's going to be ok...because you'll win, obviously.”

Harry was clearly stunned into silence by what she said because for a moment, all he could do was gape at her.

“What?!”

“Well, what did it say, Riddle will mark you as an equal - that sounds good, right?” she asked looking slightly feverish and pressing on, “and...and you'll have powers he doesn't know about! That's got to be good? Right?”

Harry's expression twisted into a grimace and Kitty felt suddenly derailed.

“That's not good?” she asked helplessly, face falling.

“If you're thinking it's some amazing power for duelling or something then don't get your hopes up,” he said bitterly, “it just means I can love.”

“What?” Kitty demanded, frowning.

“The power the Dark Lord knows not? It's love, nothing else,” Harry shrugged, he couldn't help feeling cheated by the proclamation.

“I - I don’t understand,” Kitty said, sliding back onto his bed and fixing him with a puzzled look.

“Nothing to understand...” Harry said grimacing, “I can love, Voldemort can’t...big deal.”

“How is that a power?” Kitty demanded angrily, she couldn’t help but feel somehow cheated.

“You tell me,” Harry said flatly, features looking dark and stormy now.

They both fell silent and Kitty tried to process the information. The prophecy to her seemed hazy, there was a lot of guesswork attached to it, a lot of faith in other people opinions. It didn’t even sound that useful - it didn’t tell them what would happen, or what Harry could do...it was just a stupid warning.

“This isn’t fair,” she said, feeling her anger rising now, “half-witted prophecies and scare stories made up to freak you out! They can’t make you fight him! Just refuse - just tell them that you don’t want some gypsy dictating your life! You don’t have to do it, do you?”

She was back to pacing again now, backwards and forwards across the polished floor that squeaked beneath her trainers.

“I want to.”

She was almost sure she’d heard wrong at first, and spun around to look at Harry.

“What?!”

“I want to fight him,” Harry replied steadily, looking pale faced yet determined.

“But he could kill you,” she whispered in a shocked voice.



“He could have killed you when you rescued me from that Graveyard,” he replied in a low voice, “but that didn’t stop you, did it?”

“Of course not!” she scoffed, feeling he’d completely misunderstood her, “But he was hurting you, I wasn’t going to sit back and let that happen!”

“Exactly. Kitty, people are being hurt here every day, and people are dying. More lives and families torn apart by him...”

“It’s not your fault though!” she tried desperately.

“I know that...but my parents died fighting him, Sirius has gone too now...and I may not be able to change the fact - but I can do something about it,” he said fiercely, “you can understand, can’t you Kitty? The need for revenge? For closure? To feel like you’ve tried your hardest - even if it doesn’t work?”

“You sound like you want to die,” she said in a choked voice, staring at Harry as if suddenly seeing him in a new light.

“Of course I don’t,” he said vehemently, “I just...wouldn’t be able to live if I did nothing...And if the prophecy is right, I don’t have a choice any way, it’s him or me.”

“But...but...” she spluttered, “you left Harry...one month ago you were willing to walk away...and now...what? You’ve changed your mind?”

He visibly paled at this question and Kitty tried to calm herself down. Harry seemed to be struggling with himself again, trying to answer a question either he didn’t know the answer to, or didn’t want her to know the answer of. In the end he drew a shaky breath and fixed her with a steady look, murky green eyes showing the same mixture of sadness and grief.

“One month ago I felt like I wanted to die...” he said in a shaking voice, “I felt like all I wanted was to hide away somewhere, and wait

for everything to stop...that I couldn't take seeing the things I was seeing anymore...that it wasn't fair."

"So what changed?" Kitty whispered painfully.

"Even though I'd gone...it hadn't stopped - people were still dying...I could still see them in my dreams...and I was more powerless to stop it than ever before...And I thought I was going mad with everything going around and around in my head," Harry said in a rush, as if he'd been waiting a long time to say, or even articulate, what he'd been feeling.

"All those nightmares you had...they were real?" Kitty asked in a horrified voice, "With your scar hurting and feeling sick...I knew there was something wrong Harry! Why didn't you tell me?"

"Because I didn't want you to be in any danger," he replied, throat tightening at the memory of her disappearance one night, when he'd assumed she'd been kidnapped, "and...and I didn't want you to leave me when you found out the truth either..."

"Well I can understand that," she said in a shaky voice, "guess we're both as bad as each other when it comes to secrets...But listen Harry...we can we can get through this, can't we?"

He nodded mutely, not trusting his voice for the moment.

"Of course we can...We just need to, to think..." she said distractedly, feeling suddenly as if everything was getting on top of her, "figure out everything..."

"Kitty-" began Harry worriedly before a throat being cleared behind them stopped him in his tracks.

"Hello Harry," said Mr Weasley in a pleasant, oddly formal voice, "How are you?"

“Oh, I’m er, fine Mr Weasley,” he said, shooting Kitty a worried look. However, she’d already retreated backwards to keep a respectful distance out of their conversation.

Harry hated how scared and pale she looked. He always thought that if she was worried, then it was definitely time for him to start, and that scared him.

“Do you mind if I talk to you seriously for a moment?” asked Mr Weasley and Harry’s heart sank.

Here comes another big speech about how running away was a Bad and Stupid Idea.

“Sure,” he said heavily.

“Good,” he said shortly, lifting something heavy up and placing it on his bed next to him.

“What’s this-” began Harry before he stopped, heart sinking as he realised what it was.

“I wondered if you might know something about or families vault sudden acquisition of 1250 galleons?”

At the Ministry of Magic, Kingsley Shacklebolt, Mad-Eye Moody and Dewpond were talking in the Auror Department, perfecting the air of casualness and nonchalance should anyone decide to study them in more detail than a passing glance. However, their subject of conversation was far from casual.

“It’s been hard enough hiding all of this from the ministry and Aurors,” Kingsley said, casting a wary eye across the sea of booths, each containing a pair of ears that would be very interested in what he had to say.

“Well, thankfully all this drama over Fudge is keeping everyone occupied,” Moody said gruffly, whose magical eye was spinning wildly, trying to take in the whole room.

“Not for too much longer,” warned Dewpond anxiously, “my sources tell me Scrimgeour will be in by the day after tomorrow...and we know the first person he’ll want to talk to will be the boy.”

“Fudge is already trying to track him,” Kingsley said, “luckily he thinks Dumbledore is still trying to hide him. But I’m having trouble trying to deflect attention from the attack in Little Hangleton, they still want to question the girl, at least they think she’s just a passing muggle witness now.”

“Good work on those memory charms,” nodded Moody with obvious approval, “but now we need to take action, most of the Death Eaters she identified are under watch already, there’s not much more we can get out of her that’ll be any good.”

“I’d still feel better if we waited for Dumbledore,” Dewpond told them, twisting his wand between his fingers.

“Who knows how long he’s going to be at that conference? They’re really dragging it out now,” Moody snapped, “you’d think the reappearance of You-Know-Who fully regenerated in the middle of the Ministry of Magic would be good enough to convince them, but no, Johnny Foreigner needs more persuading! Ha!”

Moody snorted with derision, silently fuming before pulling himself together.

“Meanwhile, we have to hold down the fort, and that includes sorting out this mess! Merlin knows we’ve got enough to worry about with Dementor attacks and prisoners gallivanting across the countryside and bridges blowing up without this! Order members dropping like flies, muggles in Hogwarts and Potter poisoned!”

Moody fell silent again, glaring at Dewpond with such ferocity that his voice stuttered into action.

“Of course, I understand, I was just...thinking aloud.”

“Good, because this is going to take some organising. We need to know exactly where we need to go, who we need on our side, we’ll need some good wandwork, decent stories...” he began listing, ticking them off on his hand, “Kingsley, I want you there with me, Dewpond, you’ll have to liaise with us once we’re at our destination. Do you still have that contact in the Department of Misinformation?”

Dewpond nodded silently.

“Get in touch with her, and double quick. This needs to be sorted before Scrimgeour’s takeover.”

Dewpond nodded, shortly followed by Kingsley and finally Moody, before they all, as if by some unspoken agreement, drifted off their separate ways.

Harry had never wanted more deeply and desperately for the ground to swallow him whole. Since he’d woken up he’d had to sit through some pretty awful, long sermons, but none of them had left him as uncomfortable and guilty feeling as this one. Mr Weasley wasn’t happy, at all, about what Harry had done on a whim all those weeks ago.

“Harry, I admire you for wanting to help my family,” Mr Weasley he was telling him in a quiet, firm voice, “but it is my duty as a father and husband to provide for my family, not yours.”

“Oh...I...I know...” mumbled Harry feeling his cheeks burn with shame, “I just wanted to help...”

“I know that Harry,” he replied, giving him the ghost of a smile, “but the thought is enough.”

He lifted the chest off his bed and placed it onto the bedside table, the echoes of it hitting the wood horribly magnified in the stifling silence.

“Now, I must get back to the Ministry, Merlin knows what’s happened while I’ve been away!” he said, his voice sounding jovial once more as he rose, “We’ve probably got a new minister.”

He fixed his travelling cloak around his shoulders and Harry couldn't bear to look at him - it had seemed like such a good idea all those weeks ago to give his inheritance to the Weasley's, but now he felt as if he'd insulted them in some way.

"I'm sorry Mr Weasley," he blurted out, risking a look at the weary man.

"Already forgotten Harry," he said, giving him a fatherly squeeze of the shoulder, "as I've said, your heart was in the right place. Now get some rest, Cathy, you make sure he does as he's told."

Kitty, who'd been silently watching the exchange nodded quickly, already on her feet as the man walked away. She stood next to Harry's bed, holding his hand tightly as they watched him disappear around the corner.

Harry didn't want to look at Kitty, money was a topic of conversation that put both her and Ron on equal footings when it came to their sensitivity for their situations. Even more than that however, he didn't want to look at the chest, which seemed to be a looming presence in the corner of his eye, taunting him.

Sirius died so you could have a nice fat pile of cash.

Lucky him.

However, he may not want to look at her, but Kitty was studying him intently - he felt caught between two stares, Kitty's calculating one and the chest's accusing. After a moment she released his hand and walked around the side of the bed to study the chest and Harry took the opportunity to look as far in the opposite direction as he could.

After a few moments he heard Kitty make a small noise, perhaps of realisation because a moment later she spoke.

"It was Sirius'," she stated, and he could see out of the corner of his eye she had run her fingers across the crest on the top of the chest.

He made a neutral sound in the back of his throat as if the answer didn't really bother him. After another lingering silence he heard Kitty opening the cupboard doors and rooting around inside and after a moment he turned to see what she was doing. She was shoving the chest deep inside the cavity, which was of course magically expanded anyway, before closing it with a snap.

She stood up and shot him a pale faced look, "Out of sight, out of mind, right? Don't think about it."

He felt so grateful he thought his heart might burst - how had she known his feelings about the money? How did she know he wanted it hidden?

"I know you better than you think, huh?" she asked half jokingly after seeing his expression of wonder.

"Can you read minds?" he asked, her piercing blue eyes reminding him so forcibly of Dumbledore's that he felt she was using legillimency.

"Only yours," she said, ruffling his hair half heartedly, "and plus, I wouldn't want that thing around either. Now, Mr Weasley was right, you need some rest - you look godawful."

"Thanks a lot," he said dryly, sinking back into his pillows gratefully, "but I feel fine."

"Well, you may feel fine but you look like shit," she said simply, "why don't you just have a sleep and I might see you tonight?"

"Ok," he sighed, unable to deny that he wasn't desperately tired and couldn't fall asleep in an instant.

"Wow, that must be the first time you've backed down without argument you must be tired," joked Kitty, patting down his bedclothes absentmindedly, "Try not to worry about it."

Harry gave a slight nod and Kitty planted a kiss on his forehead before turning to go.

“Kitty,” he blurted out as she walked away “you’re...ok...aren’t you?”

“I’m fine,” she replied in her brightest, chronic-liar voice, which seemed, if anything, to worry Harry even more, “Don’t worry. Just sleep.”

As she left the Hospital Wing she felt the false smile slip off her face to be replaced by cold, hard fear. Today had just been one drama and revelation after another and if she’d ever felt as if she couldn’t handle it, today was that time. She wanted nothing more than to run and hide somewhere safe and warm, where witches and wizards were a holiday joke, where magic was confined to the movies and Harry was safe and happy.

She strode down the draughty corridors, deep in thought. Her mind was swimming with thoughts about prophecies and destiny - two things she’d never really believed in or cared about until now. Did she honestly believe the prophecy? No. But then again, what did she know? Until last week she’d never believed in werewolves either, or wizards for that matter.

She bit the edge of her thumb nail absentmindedly, what she really needed right now was someone to talk to about all this, who could explain things to her better. She wished Tonks was around but she hadn’t seen her much over the past few days and a quick glance out of the leaded window beside her told her why.

The pearly white moon shone down on her through the clear sky, a few slithers of light past full moon. Although she was a little sketchy on the whole werewolf thing, she’d seen enough movies to know that Remus should be 100 human by now so that meant Tonks would surely be back soon. Even so she gave a heavy sigh, she needed to talk to someone now.

All at once she found that her feet had stopped walking, as if they’d reached their destination and for a moment she stared at them in



surprise, before looking around. In front of her was a heavy looking door flanked by two winged statues, eyeing her beadily in a way that for a moment made her think they were almost alive.

She stared at them uneasily, wondering why the image of a magpie had just sprung to mind, simultaneously battling the niggling feeling in the back of her mind that she was forgetting something important. She squinted at the statues warily, trying not to directly think about remembering whatever it was she was supposed to be remembering in the hope it would suddenly become clear.

After a moment she shook her head, she was letting statues scare her now, honestly she scolded herself, soon it'll be jumping at the sight of vases or rugs. She began to walk away from the door, unable to stop herself shooting a few more glances over her shoulder at it before she broke into a quick stride to get away from it. The stride turned into a run and before she knew it she was flying down unknown corridors relishing the burning of her lungs and trying to ignore the tears gathering in her eyes.

But she couldn't help it, the unfairness of it all struck her once more - why Harry? Why her? Was the prophecy real? Would Harry be ok? Would they live to see this wars end? The very thought that Harry could die, as real as the possibility had been for the past two weeks, struck her once more and she couldn't help but picture Harry dropping down like those Death Eaters in the church.

She skidded to a halt, grasping the wall for support as she gulped down the air and tried to shake the feeling she was going to be sick. She gasped and panted until she could walk once more and she began to move down the draughty corridor once more, determinedly wiping the tears from her face. A look at her hand a few minutes later showed a dark strip of smudged makeup and she guessed she must look like a state. She was just wiping her face with her cuff when she noticed a shiny bronze plate gleaming from the opposite door.

It read 'Girls'.

Gratefully she walked over to it pushing it open to reveal a gloomy, dank looking stone-walled room, complete with old fashioned wooden-stalled toilets and stone basins against the walls. She walked over to the first one she could see and began to run the tap, bending over and splashing as much of the cooling water on her face as possible. Kitty surveyed her puffy features in the chipped mirror, staring deep into her own eyes wondering if she'd ever feel strong or happy again.

She gave a deep sniff and was reaching over for a paper towel when she caught sight of something in the mirror. A figure sitting on the floor watching her silently. Instead of jumping or whirling around she merely stared back the girl, feeling that somehow she should have known. The one person she would have liked least to watch her breakdown just happened to be sitting there.

Typical.

"Don't you know it's rude, and slightly freaky, to watch people like that without saying anything?" she muttered, running the tap once more and refusing to turn around.

"I thought you might leave if I stayed quiet," replied Hermione in a thick, oddly flat voice.

Kitty gave a humourless, short laugh "You know, in my world, we have names for people like you, and none of them nice. Peeping Tom is the kindest I'd say, psychopath works well too."

Hermione didn't reply and Kitty took a shaky breath, she really didn't want to cry in front of Hermione of all people but didn't think, present situations being as they were, that she'd be able to stop herself. It wasn't until the girl gave a wet sniff behind her that she realised something was wrong. Sure enough, when she turned around she found her slumped on the wet floor, tissue clasped in one hand.

For a moment she was taken aback, crossed between surprise and curiosity - Hermione didn't strike her as the sobbing sort, or the type to

sit on wet toilet floors. As much as she disliked the girl, she couldn't help but feel a momentary stab of something.

She was about to ask her what was up when Hermione looked over to her suddenly.

“Why are you so upset?”

She was so taken aback by the sudden show of sympathy that she forgot to actually say anything or a moment.

“Is Harry ok?”

“ Depends on your viewpoint,” Kitty said miserably, feeling undecided for a moment before slumping on the floor opposite the girl.

“What do you mean?” she asked at once, sitting forward and regarding her with puffy, red eyes.

“If you'd heard a prophecy that basically stated you may well be murdered in the upcoming months, would you be ok?”

The change that came over Hermione was instantaneous. She sat bolt upright and stared at Kitty, obviously aghast, “Harry heard the prophecy?”

“Yeah,” choked Kitty, focussing on the silver ring on her finger she was twisting around to try and fight the tears back, “Harry told me the...the basic gist of it is m-murder or be murdered. Either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives.”

Hermione repeated this line back to her, silently mouthing it, a look of frantic desperation as she sought the loophole just as Kitty had, and she supposed, just as Harry once had.

“But that's not right...” Hermione said distractedly, almost as if she was talking to herself, “neither can live whilst the other survives. They're both alive already...they both survived...”

“I wouldn’t call seeing people dying in your head every night living,” Kitty muttered, thinking about all those times she’d watched Harry sleeping, muttering to himself.

“Perhaps that’s it...” Hermione mused, even quieter now, “they can’t be free of each other...Harry’s dreams, knowing what You-Know-Who’s feeling...seeing through the eyes of the snake...crossed lives, paths...”

Kitty tried to follow the girls rambles, but her voice got quieter and her thoughts more and more jumbled until she gave up. Obviously, her way of dealing with horrible news was to investigate it aloud, testing possibilities and confusing everyone around her. Kitty’s on the other hand was much more simple - she’d ignore it. She hadn’t believed in fortune tellers for the past 16 years of her life and she wasn’t about to start now. If she didn’t believe it, it couldn’t happen...it wouldn’t happen.

She remembered uncomfortably the visit into the Forest and the Centaurs predictions - they were right in the way she had sort of healed Harry, but they’d said she had the power to heal two people and they were definitely wrong about that...

She frowned to herself, before shooting a look over to Hermione. The girl certainly looked awful, her frizzy hair was pointing in every direction and her face was red and puffy from crying. A small, nastier part of her was quite cheered up by the fact that someone was feeling worse than her, especially as that person was Hermione. But the other part of her, the one that thought about the future and Harry, felt bad watching her sitting on the cold damp floor, knees drawn up to her chest and head buried in her arms.

“Why are you so upset then?” she asked finally, watching the girls shoulder shake slightly again.

There was a wet sniff from somewhere beneath the hair until she finally spoke.

“You wouldn’t understand,” she replied hoarsely.

“Ha, you’re probably right there,” Kitty admitted, wondering why she was bothering, “but try me. Misery loves company.”

“I don’t want to talk to anyone,” she said in a muffled voice, still hidden away.

Kitty frowned at her, she had half a mind to leave there and then - she didn’t have to put up with this, even Harry couldn’t begrudge her not getting on with this girl. God knew she had more than enough of her own worries to work through. However, she was almost as stubborn as she was upset and decided to persevere, at least it would take her mind of things.

“Are you upset about Ron?” she guessed.

The quiet crying stopped for a moment and she lifted her head of her arms to fix Kitty with a cautious look.

“Because he stuck up for me and not you?” she continued.

“He didn’t stick up for you,” she said, looking almost angry.

“Because he disagreed with you then?” Kitty asked with a small smile on her lips.

“Don’t you dare laugh at me!” Hermione burst out, obviously catching her grin, “You’ve got no idea what it’s like for me! And before you go off on one about how misunderstood you are and how horrible your times been this past month - try and imagine what it’s been like for five years!”

Kitty, who had already been forming her angry retort halfway through Hermione’s rant, stopped instantly, mouth hanging open.

“And do you know what? I get it? I know I’ve been a cow to you! And I know how horrible and hard it’s been! Because we’re used to it! This I how it is! Every year things just get worse and worse! And Harry gets more and more distant, deeper in things, dangerous things,

until none of us can get out now! And all we can do is wait for things to get worse! For somebody else to die!”

“Hermione-” began Kitty in a shocked voice.

“No! You don’t understand yet, you can’t!” Hermione ranted, scrabbling to her feet, “You don’t know what He’s capable of! What I know he’s going to do to us, to Harry! To Ron!”

Kitty also scrambled to her feet, unsure of how to act around this suddenly volatile, almost hysterical girl in front of her.

“We’re going to die! Do you realise what knowing that feels like? What waking up everyday and expecting your best friends, your family, the people you love, to be dead? Or worse? I feel like I’m the only one who knows, everyone carries on as if it’ll all be ok in the end, that we’ll all get through this, alive, unhurt...but we won’t!”

“You will,” Kitty said, feeling uncomfortably panicked by the girl’s words, “Harry will-”

“Harry will what?” she asked, throwing her arms out wide, “Harry will defeat the darkest wizard our world has ever known?”

“Yes,” stuttered Kitty.

“I want him to, and I know that he’ll never rest until he does it...but Harry doesn’t know what he’s capable of...the things I’ve read,” gasped Hermione, grabbing the front of Kitty’s shirt desperately, “Cathy the things I’ve read...what happened last time...we can’t survive that! And he’ll be gone...they both will.”

“Hermione,” struggled Kitty, “you’ve got to calm down...you’re getting hysterical!”

“Can you blame me?” she asked in a cracked voice, “I spend my whole life being the reliable one! Sorting out everyone else’s problems, being understanding! Well I’m sick of it! I want someone to take care of me, to tell me it’ll be ok, that it’s all over! I just want all

this to be over...I wish none of this had ever happened...I wish it was happening to someone else..."

"I know," Kitty tried, patting her on the back, feeling powerless, "it's not fair..."

"It's not fair for any of us!" she said vehemently, shocking Kitty with her sudden passion, "We shouldn't have to think about murderers and plots...Death Eaters and Dark Lords! We should be normal! We shouldn't have to worry about the people we love being tortured and killed! We shouldn't be scared about loving someone too much because one day they'll be taken away from us!"

Kitty could help but stare at Hermione in shocked silence. She was right, this shouldn't be happening to them, they shouldn't have to worry about any of this.

"You've got a chance to leave all this behind you know - you can get out," Hermione told her, "before it's too late."

"It's already too late," Kitty told her quietly, "Would you leave Ron now, if you had a choice?"

"No," she whispered, "I couldn't leave now, even if I had a choice..."

"Me too."

Hermione nodded, almost to herself when Kitty asked the question she hadn't dared to ask yet.

"Do, do you think Harry will make it?"

Hermione thought for a moment and was about to answer when the door to the bathroom was thrown open, banging off the wall opposite and reverberating loudly. Ron, Ginny and the Twins walked in, pausing in their tracks when they saw the two girls stood face to face, Hermione still grasping Kitty's shirt.

“Everything...ok?” asked Fred slowly, looking between the two anxiously.

The two girls unconsciously stepped backwards away from each other at the same moment.

“It’s fine,” they replied in unison.

Kitty looked over to them, noticing Ginny still giving her silent, evil glares, but the other three seemed quite concerned.

“We were just...chatting,” said Hermione, surreptitiously wiping her eyes before Kitty followed suit, “about...stuff.”

“Well,” began George looking to Fred for support, “we thought we’d better come and tell you...”

“Tell us what?” asked Hermione sharply.

“Bill, Charlie and Tonks just came in with Professor Lupin,” he said.

“And?”

“We think there might be something wrong with him.”

Kitty, Hermione and the Weasley’s arrived at the Hospital Wing at the same time as another group of witches and wizards, whom Kitty had seen around the castle the past few weeks but never spoken too. They all looked concerned and she pushed herself forward until she could see Remus.

He was lying on a hospital bed and fell down from Harry’s and she knew at once that something was wrong. He was deathly pale, with dark circles underneath his eyes and a gaunt, half-dead look to him. Kitty looked across to Tonks, who was stood to the side, slightly in front of the group of people who were all watching the Matron work and offering advice. She looked almost as pale as Remus was but had a strangely hard, closed look on her face. Kitty made her way



over to her, knowing full well that nobody knew about her and Remus except herself.

“Tonks,” whispered Kitty when she was stood next her, “what’s happened?”

She didn’t look at Kitty, or seem as if she was about to reply anytime soon and Kitty looked over to Remus anxiously.

“Was it him? Tom Riddle?” she whispered even quieter suddenly very afraid.

Tonks took a steady breath and folded her arms across her chest, “Who?”

Kitty was scared at how distant and empty her voice seemed.

“You know, the guy that hurt Harry?”

“Oh. No it wasn’t ...”

“Well...well who was it?” she demanded.

Tonks seemed to give this a long thought, her eyes narrowing as she watched a tall, greasy haired, hook-nosed man lean over Remus.

“Me,” she replied finally in a hard voice.

“What?!”

“I’m going to have ask all of you to leave right now and give us some space to work!” cried the Matron over the steady hum of people talking.

Before Tonks elaborate on what she had said the Matron was flapping them all backwards angrily and the hook-nosed man began to pull the curtains around the bed. Kitty couldn’t fail to miss the sadistic smile on the man’s face when he caught sight Tonks’ expression, or fail to hear her whispered threat.

“Anything happens to him Snape, you’ll pay.”

“Why don’t you go cry to your mummy and daddy about it?” he suggested cruelly, yanking the curtains between them.

The shocked, furious look on Tonks’ face lasted momentarily before she gave a snort of derision and strode over to the two eldest Weasley brothers without another word. Kitty watched her in surprise, wondering what this guy Snape had against Tonks and what she had meant by she’d done this to Remus. She looked around the Hospital Wing to see everyone standing in small groups, talking between themselves. Despite her talk with Hermione, she didn’t feel like joining their little group and Harry was dead to the world.

“Cathy?”

She spun around to find herself face-to-face with a tall, black wizard with a deep voice, “I’m Kingsley Shacklebolt, I’m an Auror.”

“Oh yeah?” she replied, not particularly caring, “Like Tonks?”

“Yes, just like Tonks,” he said with a wide smile, “I was wondering if we could talk a little bit more about what happened the night you and Potter got injured.”

He had gestured to the raggedy looking man standing in the background - the one with the deformed eye and gruff voice.

“Now?” she asked uncomfortably, shooting a look behind her at Remus’ bed.

“Yes we’re putting together a case that’s going to court very soon and we need more information,” he replied easily, flashing her another understanding smile.

“Oh...well fine,” she said thinking they’d picked a fine time for it, “can Tonks come with me?”

“No,” he said quickly, before smiling again, “I think she’s quite busy here don’t you?”

“Yeah, I suppose,” she conceded, watching her talk in a low furious voice with the two Weasley’s in the corner, “I’ll just tell Harry.”

She hoped she’d have enough time to ask him how much she should tell them and which bits she could leave out.

“I wouldn’t wake him up if I were you,” Kingsley replied.

Her heart sank.

“Fine.”

“Excellent, now follow us,” he said, already turning to go.

Kitty frowned at them - so now she was doing what they wanted they forgot to smile or be nice? She already disliked the man and was frankly revolted by the other - what a nice way to finish an awful day she thought miserably.

“Perhaps you could bring your bag along too?” he asked her casually over his shoulder.

She faltered in her steps for a moment.

“What for?” she asked suspiciously.

“Evidence,” he replied simply.

All at once the feeling stole over her that something was wrong - this wasn’t right. They were already leading her over to her bed.

“What sort of evidence?” she asked casually.

“Magical traces,” he said.

He was lying! She had practically wrote the book on lying and could spot it a mile away. But why? What purpose would it serve? She could feel the beginning of panic stealing over her - why did they want her to leave, where were they going, why would she need her bag?

They had reached her bed and the gruff man, Moody, was already holding the door to her bedside cabinet open. Wordlessly she took out her bag and hugged it to herself, already feeling safer.

“Is that everything?” asked Kingsley, “we’ll need to check everything.”

They were going to get rid of her.

The idea arrived in her head as suddenly and as forcefully as a bolt of lightning. She stared between the men and realised she was right, they were both looking official, both visually searching her bed for any trace of her being there both had their wands out.

“I think I left some stuff over at Harry’s bed,” she said in a strangely calm voice, hurrying over to his bed before they could stop her.

However they were hot on her heels and when she reached his bed she went to his cabinet, opened the door and stuck her head in.

“Harry!” she hissed, pretending to search it thoroughly.

“Can’t you find it?” asked Moody gruffly, also bending down with her.

“I - I must have left it somewhere else,” she said, straightening up and snapping the door shut so Moody couldn’t see Harry’s money.

“We’ll find it later,” he said shortly, “let’s go.”

Her mind had gone blank, she didn’t know what to say or do to stall them anymore and found herself being led away from Harry and towards the door. Everyone was too busy talking and so concerned about Remus that they didn’t notice them leaving. Even Ron and

Hermione was right on the other side of the Hospital Wing, backs turned to her.

She had to do something, now.

“Harry!” she shouted, turning around and side stepping her guards.

They looked momentarily surprised.

“HARRY!” she shouted even louder, aware now that at least people were looking towards the source of noise.

She could see he was already waking up.

Harry was aware that someone was shouting his name and after a few confused moments he realise it was Kitty’s voice, and that it wasn’t a dream.

“HARRY!”

"What's going on?" he demanded groggily, feeling dazed and confused.

"They're trying to kill me!" cried Kitty, and as he struggled to sit up he could see she was backing away from Moody and Kingsley desperately.

"No we're not," laughed Kingsley, looking for all the world as if he thought Kitty was playing a joke on them..

"They're trying to get rid of me!" she yelled even louder and the hubbub of what he now realised was a packed room, lessened.

Everyone was turning to watch the unfolding scene with widened eyes and Harry tried to push himself up in bed, finding his arms completely unresponsive. He was having trouble clearing his foggy thoughts and realising what she was saying - what was she talking about?

"What's going on?" Harry tried to shout, voice coming out as nothing more than a weak, quiet demand.

"We just want to talk to Cathy on our own for a while," assured Moody, eyes trained on Kitty as she backed further away down the hospital wing, "about the attack on you."

"Why did you tell me to bring all my stuff then?" she demanded, waving her rucksack at them.

Harry gaped at her before looking across the gathering crowd in disbelief. He found Tonks was already striding towards them, expression looking hard as stone.

"What, what's going on?" Harry asked her, trying again to sit up and failing miserably, "where are they taking her?"

"I don't-" began Tonks.

"-They're going to get rid of me aren't they!" Kitty yelled furiously once again and everyone turned to her anxiously, "they were going to sneak me off while you were asleep!"

"That's not what's going to happen dear," assured Mrs Weasley in a kindly voice, "is it gentlemen?"

There was an awkward silence and everyone suddenly realised that it was indeed the plan, Kitty was going to be discreetly disposed of while they were busy with other things. Harry felt his stomach turn to ice.

"You're not serious are you?" demanded Harry angrily, forcing himself to sit up and wincing painfully, "Tonks?"

She didn't say anything, she was too busy staring at Moody with a furious expression on her face. Everyone began to mutter loudly to each other and Kitty was rooted to the spot, staring from one person to the next.

"What would they do?" whispered Ron to Hermione, looking from the girl to Harry quickly.

"You're going to obliviate her?" asked Hermione in a horrified whisper, hand raised to her mouth.

"WHAT?!" exploded Harry, finding his voice at last as everyone began to talk loudly at once.

"What? What does that mean?" demanded Kitty, suddenly fear was creeping into her voice, "Harry, what does that mean?"

"Why are you going to do that?" Mrs Weasley was asking, stony glare and hand on hips as she surveyed Moody and Kingsley.

"Because what sense would there be in a muggle running around knowing everything about the magical world?" said Moody simply, looking unfazed by all the fuss.

"When were you going to tell me?" Harry tried to shout above the din, he couldn't believe this was happening...

"You can't do that!" cried Hermione vehemently.

"Harry?" yelled Kitty, becoming more and more fearful.

"I don't see the reason!" cried Mrs Weasley, "I won't let you do that!"

"Harry!" Kitty shouted once again, clutching her bag to her chest, "what does that mean?"

"It's beyond your jurisdiction," said Moody, holding his wand out, "I'm sorry."

"No you're not!" Hermione said, furious blotches of red in her cheeks.

Moody however side-stepped Hermione, who had been standing in his way of Kitty and brandished his wand. Kitty eyes grew wide as she watched him cast the spell and her legs sprung into action, milliseconds after Harry had yelled 'DUCK!' and Moody had roared

'Obliviate!' There was uproar in room and for a few moments of complete confusion no one knew what was happening. Harry was yelling Kitty's name and everyone was shouting at Moody, at each other, for Kitty.

"Ha, sit on that you fucker," came her voice suddenly, from somewhere behind one of the beds.

Harry almost laughed aloud, delirious with happiness, she hadn't been hit!

"Now," she breathed, her voice echoing around the room which had now fallen silent, "explain to me what it...what it means..."

"It means they'll wipe your memory," said Hermione tearfully, a trace of an accusatory note in her voice and she looked sidelong at Moody, "so you won't remember anything since you met Harry."

There was absolute silence in the room and Harry tried to maintain his upright position, head swimming as he took in what was happening. He wanted to yell himself hoarse, he wanted to rage against everyone for trying to take away the one thing he lived for now, but he couldn't. His body didn't seem to want to act on what he told it to do and he felt trapped. He closed his eyes against the pain and listened, he could hear the silence as everyone waited for her reply, stretching out limitless before them.

And then...he heard the sound of soft crying.

His eyes snapped open and he could feel the anger boiling up inside himself.

"You can't do that," came her whispered, tortured voice.

"No, they can't," Mrs Weasley said in a strong, angry voice.

"Yes, we can," said Kingsley.

"No you can't!" Hermione shouted angrily.



"Yes, we can," added Moody - Harry's head swam, the argument was just going round and round, "it is our duty as Aurors, as employees of the Ministry of Magic and members of the Order. We have to think about our safety."

"Shut the fuck up Moody!" Harry yelled, every muscle in his body screaming

Everyone started yelling at once, there was confusion, Moody was trying to get across the room to where she was hiding, Harry felt himself shouting for him to stop, Bill and Tonks were moving forward, looking uncertain as to what was happening.

Click.

Harry's blood ran cold. He knew what that was, he'd heard that noise before on one terrible night, over a month ago. He stared at the source of the noise, no-one else seemed to have registered it's importance.

"What was that?" he heard Ron ask blankly.

"No, Kitty," whispered Harry, feeling as if his feet were being pulled from underneath him sharply, "don't."

He was aware that he was trying to get out of bed now, causing most people to divert their attention momentarily away from Kitty, who was standing up slowly, facing the crowd. She looked him dead in the eye and he could see the fear, the desperation in her eyes.

"Please," he begged her, "don't start this."

"Start what?" asked Hermione, looking over to Kitty.

When she saw what she had in her hands she gave a muffled scream and leapt backwards. Everyone was spinning around to face her and only she, Tonks and Harry fully comprehended what was happening. Harry's memory flashed back to the first night they'd ran away, when Kitty had threatened her father, and now it was just the same. Her hands were shaking just as much, causing her aim to wander around

the large row of slightly confused witches and wizards, who was staring from Hermione to Kitty looking puzzled.

"What's a matter?" asked Ron quickly as Tonks backed away slightly, "what is that?"

"Put it down Cathy," was all Hermione said, looking tearful, "this won't solve anything!"

"It'll solve enough!" she cried, tears splashing down her cheeks, "now...you lot, put your wands or whatever down, on the floor where I can see them!"

"Kitty," Harry pleaded desperately, "no..."

"We'll do no such thing," said Moody with a gruff laugh, sounding slightly nonplussed by Kitty's new-found authority.

"You better do it Mad-Eye," said Tonks slowly, eyes trained on the muzzle of the gun, "nice and slow..."

"What's going on Hermione?" Harry heard Ron whisper as he stared at Kitty, hoping and praying she'd look his way so he could get her to stop, but she was steadfastly refusing to look his way.

"Why should I suddenly go around dropping my wand just because she asks?" he laughed incredulously, and several of the others nodded along.

Couldn't they sense the muggleborns terror? Couldn't they see the manic glint in Kitty's eye, hear the desperation in her voice, see her stance of defensive protection? Tonks and Hermione had raised their hands slightly and Ron was asking her over and over again what was going on. The others seemed to sense something was amiss and was now looking at the gun with a kind of confused curiosity.

"Drop your wands!" shouted Kitty, gun trained on Moody now, who glared at it.

"No," was all he said and Harry could feel himself shaking, a cold sweat had broken out across his body as he remembered her saying once she could have killed her father, remembered her reliving that night in the graveyard.

"He's dead Harry...I pumped six bullets into his chest...he's dead."

Would it be the same now...

"DROP THEM!" she shrieked loudly as Tonks and Hermione dropped theirs.

Nothing happened for a few seconds.

Then Kitty gave a frustrated yell, threw her arm up in the air just before everyone jumped out of their skins as a booming explosion ripped through the hospital wing.

Everyone screamed and Harry was shouting to Kitty who was sobbing now, arm shaking as it pointed at the ceiling, which now had an impressive hole in the ceiling, raining plaster down around her. Ron had given an almighty start and had dragged Hermione to the floor, as had nearly everyone else, shouting or shrieking at each other in complete confusion.

They'd never seen a gun before.

"You s-stupid fuckers..." began Kitty, hiccupping deeply as the tears continued to flow, "w-why won't you LISTEN TO ME?"

"We're listening now," Tonks replied, safe on the floor where she was being protected by Bill, who looked pale and shocked, "ok Cathy? We're listening now..."

"Ok, good," she breathed, gun pointing aimlessly into the crowd now, "n-now, wands o-on the floor!"

The air was filled with the sound of wood clattering to the ground, no one needed any more encouragement than the sight of the gaping hole in the ceiling.

"G-good, now explain to me...what's...what's going to happen now?"

"The plan, it seemed," began Tonks, managing, despite her fear, to inject an accusatory tone into her voice, "was to oblivate you. That would mean that all your memories since you met Harry would be erased and you'd be given new ones. You'd never know that they weren't real..."

Kitty was sobbing even more now, shifting from foot to foot as she tried to process this information. However, it was beyond her abilities and she waved it aside with the flick of her gun.

"That's not g-going to h-happen, ok?" she told everyone, expecting some kind of chorus of agreement, but it seemed everyone was too scared, "w-what's the other option?"

"There is no other option," growled Moody, eyeing the gun with deep suspicion and loathing.

"YES THERE IS!" she screamed and everyone flinched and fell silent  
"Tell me it!"

"I don't know Kitty," said Tonks in a strained voice, looking to the others for help.

However, everyone's gaze was fixed on the gun in Kitty's hand, which was still shaking terribly as Kitty was. Harry tried to climb out of the bed, against the protestations of his body but nobody else. They hadn't seemed to realise what he was trying to do.

"We can't afford to let you go like this Kitty," tried Kingsley in a soothing voice.

"I'm not going anywhere!" she sobbed.

"You can't stay here - you know you can't!" Moody supplied, "And you can't leave here like this, you know too much."

“I don’t know anything!” she shrieked, “I don’t understand anything!”

“It doesn’t matter, they have ways of finding out everything,” he said as Harry collapsed back onto the bed, his body wouldn’t move, it refused every scream of command his brain issued.

“I won’t tell anyone...I promise...” she sobbed, tears rolling down her face constantly making it look blotchy and red.

“If they found you, and believe me when I say that’s entirely likely, they’re going to make you tell them everything,” Moody explained to her firmly, “and they’ll use that information to kill Harry, do you want that?”

“Don’t you dare say that!” Tonks stormed as everyone began to talk at once at his words.

Kitty however reeled back as if she was slapped, tears suddenly stopped by the shock of Moody’s words as her face drained of colour. She was shaking terribly now, dropping the gun to her side.

“Kitty...don’t listen,” Harry told her desperately, “they won’t!”

It was terrible to watch, the complete breakdown of a person, but the assembled Hospital Wing watched in silence as Kitty’s face crumpled in pain, unable now to even cry as she fell into a crumpled heap to the floor. She wrapped her arms around her head, gun still clasped with white knuckled hands.

“Kitty...” Harry begged, making a supreme effort to get up, “don’t...don’t listen...”

“This isn’t the only way and you know it!” Tonks said in a strong voice, “Cathy, that isn’t going to happen.”

“No it isn’t,” Bill also proclaimed, shooting a look of disbelief towards the two Aurors as if he couldn’t believe what they were doing.

Moody simply stared back at them, wand still raised. Kitty meanwhile was taking shuddering breaths as she sobbed with grief.

“What are our other options?” demanded Mrs Weasley now, looking at the assembled group, most of whom seemed to be scared into silence by the gun.

“They’ll use her to get to him,” Moody repeated, “you know he will because that’s what he’s done before. Remember the Prewitt’s! Remember the Bones’! Remember Sirius!”

“Don’t you dare say that!” Harry said harshly, “He won’t! Not this time!”

“He will,” Kitty replied.

Every one looked down the crumpled heap of Kitty on the floor, who was looking up at them all now, her tear streaked face was contorted with grief.

“No...Kitty,” Harry said pleadingly, “don’t listen...”

“He’ll do it, won’t he?” she repeated now in a shaking voice, “With what I know...After what I did...”

Everybody stared at her now in silence as they all understood what Moody had done, what the terrifying gleam in Kitty’s eyes meant...that she believed him, and she was going to sacrifice everything, to protect him.

“No...” begged Harry now, horrified with what was happening, “don’t you dare listen to him! He doesn’t know!”

But Kitty merely shook her head violently, and pulled herself up, whole body shaking but a strangely calm look upon her face.

“Obliviation is the only way,” growled Moody finally and Kitty turned a tear streaked face towards him.

“Oblivion?” she croaked weakly, and nodded.

He nodded back and the room was silent, all eyes were fixed on her. She seemed to have trouble coming to terms with this and the gun was shaking more than it had been through the whole confrontation. Harry watched her, his heart beating uncontrollably, his tongue stuck.

“Will I be allowed to say goodbye?” she asked in a trembling voice.

“NO!” shouted Harry suddenly, “No...you can’t do this....don’t let them do this! When have you ever let anyone tell you what to do!”

“Of course,” continued Moody as if he hadn’t heard Harry.

Kitty gave a slow nod, face becoming clear and peaceful for the first time that day. Harry watched it with mounting horror as she seemed to accept everything Moody was saying, he tried to choke out but found himself frozen.

“Cathy, you don’t want this,” Tonks warned her desperately, but she seemed to not even hear her.”

She turned to him, tears still running down her face. He saw the look in her eyes, which he had come to be able to read so well. She seemed to be staring at him as if this would be the last thing she would ever see, the last thing she would remember and he shook his head wordlessly.

She placed a hand on either side of his face and rested her forehead against his, tears splashing down her face. The Hospital Wing, the crowd of people watching them, everything faded away into nothingness.

“You never could change my mind,” she whispered, staring into his eyes.

“Please don’t,” was all he could say, tears burning his own eyes.

“We always knew we’d end in disaster,” she told him with some difficulty, “a regular Romeo and Juliet.”

“No...” he whispered painfully, “we won’t...we’ll get our happy ending.”

“People like us Harry,” she managed to choke out, “we don’t get happy endings.”

“Kitty please,” Harry said hoarsely, tears sliding down his face now, “I can’t lose you...”

“I know...”she tried to blink away the tears giving him a light kiss.

“You’re going to kill me,” Harry told her fiercely, almost angry in his despair, “I can’t...You can’t do this to me...”

“I’m so sorry,” she sobbed, leaning forward and kissing him desperately.

His tears mingled with hers as they clung onto each other, hoping to make their last moment never to end. Kitty however pulled back, gave a sniff and arranged her face so that the despair and grief wouldn’t be seen.

“I love you,” she whispered with more passion in her voice than he’d ever heard.

Harry shook his head again, desperate for this nightmare to stop, “No please...don’t.”

She gave him a slight smile that looked eerily out of place and all at once a tidal wave of memories and emotion came crashing down on him - memories that will never have existed. How could he let this happen, how could Kitty do this to him...

“I love you,” he managed to croak out.



She gave another small smile and before he could do anything else and before anyone else had time to react, she swung the gun around, pointing it at her temple.

“NOOOOO!”

Click.

AN/ Sorry for the massive delay, i've been so busy at work i haven't even had a chance to write once a week! Let alone get this monster of a chapter out for you! Thanks to everyone who reviewed and don't worry, this isn't the end of the story! More chaptr will come dealing with what's happened!

## Chapter Twenty Eight

### Bittersweet

She remembers the day they met,  
Right down to the minute,  
Her life was never the same,  
Sitting alone in the dark,  
Staring into the rain,  
Her life was never the same

“NOOOOO!”

Tonks heard Harry's scream, felt her own mingling with his as it ripped out of her throat as she saw Kitty's swinging the gun up towards her temple. In that one second it seemed as if everyone found their voice against the horror they were about to witness and the whole Hospital Wing seemed in that millisecond to scream like the hounds of hell.

Click.

BOOM...

And as violently as it began, the screaming stopped. All noise and movement ceased in an instant, like the pendulum of a great clock suddenly being halted. Tonks felt a deep shock pass through her very soul before life and noise came rushing back.

The screaming continued.

Kitty's legs seemed to fold beneath her and she crumpled to the floor as silently as a ghost.

Tonks felt like she was watching everything in slow motion; gun clattering to the floor innocently, Harry stumbling out of his bed onto the floor beside Kitty, Ron skidding towards him, Hermione screaming, hand over her mouth.

She moved towards the group huddled on the floor. Already she could tell something was wrong. Harry, whose face was twisted into a half-terrified, half-terrifying expression, had Kitty's head cradled in his lap. He lifted his hand from behind her head to study it.

It was clean.

There was no blood, no garish splash of ruby red on his pale skin, nothing.

All of this took only seconds to happen, although Tonks felt like it was the longest moment in her life.

And it was Harry who worked it out first, looking down at the pale, unconscious Kitty and then, by some sudden realisation, up towards the doorway.

Where, stood framed against the dark corridor behind him, stood Albus Dumbledore, wand aloft.

Despite the previous few moments screaming, shouting and confusion, one by one the gathered seemed to feel the Headmaster's presence because an uneasy hush gradually fell over everyone as they backed away slightly. Soon only Harry's voice could be heard, talking to Kitty in a rapid, desperate voice as Dumbledore walked towards them slowly and unsteadily.

Almost everyone's attention was fixed on the Headmaster, staring in open mouthed shock as the confusion increased - he had been at a day conference...but then why had he been at one for the past month...why was it that every day he'd be back tomorrow...

Tonks could only sway on her feet for a moment, exhausted beyond belief as she stared at the Headmaster, unable to move, speak or even think.

Dumbledore reached Harry, Kitty and Ron and knelt down beside Harry, who was ignoring him completely, still trying to speak to her.

"Harry," Dumbledore said quietly, peering at him unblinkingly over his glasses.

“Kitty,” Harry whispered, shaking her shoulder, “Kitty, wake up...please wake up...”

“Harry,” repeated the old man once more, laying a hand on Harry’s shoulder.

He looked up into his Headmasters blue eyes, feeling hopeless and confused.

“Sir...why...why won’t she wake up?” he asked in a young, scared voice.

“She’s just sleeping Harry,” he told him calmly, still maintaining eye contact, “do you understand?”

“But...but the gun...” he replied, looking around him in single-minded confusion, “she tried...she pulled the...it went off...”

Dumbledore merely nodded and directed Harry’s attention down to Kitty. He reached out a thin fingered, frail looking hand and brushed aside the braids of Kitty’s hair where she’d pointed the gun. In the silence the sound of something small and metallic hitting the stone floor echoed around the room and Harry reached out with trembling fingers to pick up the small deformed bullet. It looked as if it had hit a solid wall and crumpled in on itself.

“I...I don’t understand,” Harry whispered pleadingly, looking up to Dumbledore, “How...”

Dumbledore merely pushed aside the hair again and Harry could see a small, perfectly round bruise rising on her temple.

“I’m afraid I got here a bit late,” he stated and Harry stared between the bullet and the bruise.

“Sir...”

“I’m not as quick as I used to be,” Dumbledore said depreciatively, studying the mark on Kitty’s head, “my reflexes have been somewhat dulled of late.”

“But sir...she’s ok?” he asked, almost daring against hope.

“Just sleeping, I shall wake her when I feel she has recovered,” he replied steadily.

Harry stared at him for a moment, seemingly unable to understand this because a moment later he looked back down to Kitty and embraced her tightly against him, burying his face in her hair.

He didn’t know how long he sat there for, rocking backwards and forwards as he took shuddering breaths, holding her as tight as he could, feeling as if at any moment she would be whisked away from him. She nearly was, the small voice in the back of his mind that was still working whispered, she was a millimetre from death. If it wasn’t for Dumbledore...

He looked up to find the Headmaster, aware that he could no longer feeling his calming presence beside him to see him moving towards the assembled staff of Hogwarts, all of whom looked dazed and confused.

“Harry?”

He looked to his side to find Ron, staring at him from behind a pale face, freckles standing out awfully on his anxious expression. Harry didn’t even care that he had tears rolling down his face; he didn’t think he’d ever be able to stop them.

“You ok mate?” Ron was asking him worriedly, hand on his shoulder.

Harry bit his lip before shaking his head, still rocking with Kitty.

“No,” he whispered truthfully, “no I’m not...”

And they both knew they were talking about something deeper than right there and then.

“You will be,” Ron promised in a low voice, squeezing his shoulder, “you both will be.”

Harry nodded heavily, unseeingly and felt someone kneeling down in front of him. He looked up to find Hermione staring at him, face covered in tears too as she too tried to calm herself down. After a moment she leant forward and wrapped Harry in a hug, rocking side to side with him now.

“We’re going to get through this Harry...” she whispered into his ear, “All of us. Together.”

“I hope so,” he replied with difficulty.

Hermione pulled out of the embrace and put a hand on either side of Harry’s face, forcing him to look at her.

“We will Harry,” she said slowly and emphatically, “Now come on, let’s get Cathy into a bed and find out where Dumbledore’s been all this time, right? Does that sound like a plan Harry?”

“Yeah,” he nodded.

They all clambered to their feet, Harry being almost bodily hauled up by Ron and steadied as his tender stomach burned with pain and his head swam. The Matron, who had seemed frozen throughout the entire ordeal seemed to come to life now, directing Fred and George to help place Kitty on the nearest bed before she moved towards her, pale and flustered to begin work.

“You should get back into bed too,” Ron cautioned Harry, who was clinging onto his friends arm shamelessly to stay upright having not used his legs for nearly two weeks.

However, Harry was not listening; he was staring at Dumbledore who was surrounded by the staff and Order members who were all

appealing for information. However, Dumbledore only had eyes for the two people lingering towards the back of the room, and he began to stride towards them quickly.

Harry felt a white hot anger surge through him as he stared at Moody and Kingsley. This was all their fault. They had done this. They had pushed her until-

“How could you do that?” he demanded in a hoarse voice, feeling the blood rushing through his veins, “Why did you do that?!”

“Harry,” Ron cautioned worriedly.

“No!” he hissed, shrugging off Ron’s grip, before turning to Moody with an accusatory finger, “They’re murderers! They tried to kill her!”

“We were trying to protect us!” Moody countered gruffly, sounding less than sure now Dumbledore was staring at him silently, “We never wanted to harm her! She did that herself-”

With a roar of anger, Harry plunged his hand into Ron’s pocket and pulled out his wand, pointing it directly at the ex-Auror.

“Don’t you dare talk about her like that!” he hissed savagely, “you’re no better than Voldemort and his scum-bag followers!”

“Harry,” Ron said anxious, trying to reach for his wand, “come on, he’s not worth it!”

“What were you going to do when you’d fried her brain then?” he shouted, aware he had an audience developing, “drop her on some muggle street and leave her to it? She hasn’t got anywhere to go!”

“We had it all planned out,” Kingsley replied, eyes flicking between Harry and Dumbledore, “We were only following the protocol laid down by the Ministry regarding muggle witnesses, these are vulnerable times-”

“She’s not just a witness!” yelled Harry, swaying dangerously as his head swam for a moment, “And you know it!”

Kingsley opened his mouth to retort but Harry had enough, he was going to teach him a lesson, hex him seven ways till Sunday, obliviate his memories and see how they liked it. He mustered every spare bit of energy and anger he had inside him as he brandished the wand once more.

“Harry,” Dumbledore said quietly, “put that wand down.”

Harry paused, but didn’t lower the wand, still glaring down at the two.

“You saw what they did,” he stated trembling, “After everything she’s done! They can’t get away with it!”

“They won’t,” Dumbledore replied steadily and Harry felt a flash of smugness as he saw the expression on the two’s faces change.

“Harry,” he repeated sharply and Harry felt his arm lower almost involuntarily.

“But you saw what they were going to do!” he said savagely, “They deserve it!”

“Perhaps. But I will deal with this my way - Gentlemen, would you follow me?” Dumbledore said, turning to the two and gesturing to the door.

They both turned silently and trooped towards the door, closely followed by Dumbledore and Harry was struck by the injustice of it all. He felt somehow that his chance had been missed, that they were going to get away with nothing more than a reprimand from Dumbledore. Kitty could have died, would have died, and they still believed they had been in the right.

“Come on Harry,” said Ron calmly, deftly taking his wand away from him and turning him towards his bed.



“No I want to sit with her,” he protested, and Ron and Hermione merely directed them towards Kitty’s bed.

Tonks, Mrs Weasley and Professor McGonagall joined them a moments later at her bedside, all still obviously reeling from the headmasters sudden reappearance.

“You ok Harry?” Tonks asked him seriously.

He merely nodded wordlessly, fist tightening against the bullet he was still grasping.

“How’s the girl?” inquired McGonagall anxiously, she looked flustered and worried.

“She has a name,” Harry said harshly, forgetting entirely he was reprimanding a professor and his head of year.

“Enchanted sleep by the look of it,” Tonks replied hastily as McGonagall blinked at Harry in surprised, studying Kitty’s features.

“I just don’t understand what’s happened,” Mrs Weasley said, wringing her hanky as she surveyed Kitty too, “I thought she’d...”

“The Headmaster must have cast a spell in that instant beforehand,” McGonagall said shakily, “I thought I felt the shockwave.”

“Did you hear that silence too?” Tonks asked, “It definitely felt like some sort of complex shield charm.”

“But why...” began Mrs Weasley, before dabbing her eyes with her hanky, “I don’t understand what they were playing at!”

There was a stony silence as everyone gathered thought the same thing.

“I know that obliterating muggles is usual practice in most cases,” Mrs Weasley continued in a disbelieving tone, “but this is completely

different, they must see that...and to be honest I don't think obliviation would stop You-Know-Who anyway, just look at p-poor Gideon and Fabian..."

Ron patted his mothers back awkwardly as she buried her face in her handkerchief, shooting Hermione a worried look. His mother didn't often speak about her brothers, but there names were cropping up more often now that the war had started.

"I know that Molly," McGonagall said, nostrils flaring momentarily, "I'm sure they had other plans too. Although why we couldn't just talk this through together and decide on the best course of action I don't know."

"Best course of action?" Harry demanded, anger flaring up once more, "What is there to decide?"

"Term starts in just over a week Potter," she said, watery eyes betraying her attempt at authority, "and you know she can't stay here then. I'm sorry, but that is the way it has to be."

Harry stared at her for a moment, a number of different thoughts and feeling on the tip of his tongue before sagging with the sheer pointlessness of it. He turned back to Kitty hopelessly and everyone assembled avoided each others eyes for the moment in the awkward silence that followed.

"Kingsley and Moody must have been working with someone else in the Ministry," Tonks mused suddenly, obviously her thoughts had been dwelling on the matter, "they obviously had plans on how to hide Cathy. Why didn't they discuss this with us?"

Professor McGonagall gave an uncharacteristic shrug of the shoulders.

"Let's face it," said Tonks heavily falling into the seat by the bed, "since Dumbledore left things have been a shambles."

“And where has he been?” demanded Mrs Weasley with renewed energy, “With everything that happened this past month! With those attacks, Dementors on the loose, Azkaban empty, Harry disappearing, Amelia and Emmeline gone! Where has he been?”

“I get the feeling he wasn’t at his conference, that’s for sure,” replied Tonks grimly.

That evening Hogwarts felt as busy as it did during term-time, visitors seemed to sense the return of the Headmaster to the school because several new faces appeared and disappeared at regular intervals. The Weasley’s and Hermione stayed as long as Madam Pomfrey would allow them before they flooed back to Grimmauld House for the night, leaving Harry and Tonks alone in the Hospital Wing.

Despite all of the Matron’s various attempts of threats and cajoling, Harry refused to go back to his own bed and stayed at Kitty’s, whilst a few beds down, Tonks sat with Remus. He was awake now, looking pale and exhausted, but aware and seeming to have no more serious side-effects to the potions he’d taken than his current condition and the wrath of Tonks. Harry vaguely sensed a strange, strained atmosphere surrounding the both of them, who had spoken little since Remus’ awakening, but felt no curiosity at all.

Harry stared at Kitty, deep in thought as time trickled by, feeling only the vaguest curiosity as to where Dumbledore had been all this time, how he knew what was going to happen to Kitty and how he’d saved her. She was still asleep, looking peaceful and none the worse for wear from her near death experience, but he worried about what would happen once she woke up – Professor McGonagall had voiced what everyone had been carefully avoiding the past few days; what was going to happen to her next?

Harry bit his thumbnail anxiously, he didn’t have an answer to that question. Not a single idea. The only glint of light at the end of the tunnel came from the fact that Dumbledore was here and he wouldn’t let anything happen to her.

As if reacting to an unspoken summons, Harry heard quiet footsteps behind him and turned to find the Headmaster approaching the bed.

Harry turned back to Kitty and waited as he peered at Kitty over his half-moon spectacles.

“Excellent,” he murmured to himself, before settling himself on the seat opposite.

Harry felt as if a weight he didn’t know he’d been carrying was suddenly released.

“She’s going to be ok?” he asked in relief.

“She’ll wake up tomorrow morning none the worse for wear,” he replied, “although probably a little confused.”

Harry couldn’t help but grin to himself.

“Thanks sir,” he said sincerely, “if you hadn’t...”

“Let us not think of the dreadful consequences of Alastor’s and Kingsley’s misguided actions.”

Harry felt the flaring, biting anger once more.

“And what have you done with them, sir?” he asked tersely.

“I have shown them the error of their ways,” he replied simply, and in Harry’s mind, cryptically.

“The error of their ways?” he asked in disbelief.

“Yes, what they did was foolish and wrong and I have told them as much,” Dumbledore said, steely glint to his eye that made Harry think perhaps it wasn’t a gentle chat that had taken place, “but, and I know you may never believe me on this Harry, they thought what they were doing was the best, for all concerned.”

“But-” began Harry, spluttering with indignation before Dumbledore held a hand up.

“Harry,” he said gently, “you know that I do not agree with that and neither does almost everyone else here that witnessed that scene. I’m only sorry that I was not here sooner.”

Harry felt like roundly abusing the two further, but decided against it, closing his mouth with a snap. In a way he believed that Dumbledore would have had far more effect on the two than anything he himself could have said, or done. That didn’t change what they’d done, how Harry felt about them, or the itching in his fingers to hunt them down and hex them to hell.

“Well, you better to tell them to stay away from both of us,” he muttered almost to himself, which Dumbledore chose to ignore.

Harry tried to compose his turbulent, angry thoughts and looked at his mentor, noticing for perhaps the first time how old and frail he looked, practically a shadow of how he’d seemed only a few months ago. He had lost a great deal of weight and there was an air of slight neglect about him that made Harry even more curious about his sustained absence.

“Sir, everyone’s been saying you’ve been gone for a long time,” he began, wondering whether he should quiz the Headmaster on his whereabouts when he himself had been missing too.

“Yes, unfortunately that is correct,” he replied heavily, surprising Harry slightly.

“But no one noticed?” he continued curiously, “For all that time?”

“Ah well, the solution is easier to explain than the cause I suppose. You see, when I became headmaster I cast a great many protective charms and spells on the castle, for obvious reasons.”

“And this was one of them?” Harry continued.

“Yes. An incredibly complex charm of my own design which is triggered should the Headmaster of Hogwarts become, incapacitated

shall we say?" Dumbledore replied, sounding a little proud of himself, "As you will no doubt appreciate the school and the Headmaster are linked in a way that goes beyond the title and purpose, when I become vulnerable, so does she. I needed to make sure that she was well protected if there was any chance of my survival."

Harry gaped at Dumbledore for a moment, before trying to gather his wits, survival?

"So if you get sick, the school is still protected?" he began slowly.

"Call it a defence mechanism if you will. But when I became incapacitated, the spell was triggered and the school pretends with all its might that I'm still here and capable."

"Is that why everyone thought you were at a conference? For weeks and weeks?" he asked the Headmaster incredulously, "Didn't they suspect anything?"

"Ah, and that is the beauty, if I do say so myself, of the charm. It suppresses all suspicion, all curiosity, all anxiety because everyone is certain of course, that I would be back tomorrow. As long as I wasn't seen, the illusion would be maintained."

"And how long could that go on for?" Harry asked, curious himself now, "Forever?"

"Ah, I had set a time limit fortunately, the school can't run for long without its headmaster," he said, smiling slightly to himself, "I had four weeks to sort myself out before the school, and everyone connected to it, admitted there was something was wrong. Luckily, a certain muggle girl wandered into my office a week ago to give me that little kick I needed to continue."

"Who? Kitty?" Harry asked incredulously, looking down at her sleeping form bed.

"Yes, I think if it hadn't been for her finding and helping me to brew the antidote to my illness, I would not be here now, and so

consequently we could say, neither would she. Funny how things like that come around, isn't it?"

"But she never said anything about you!" Harry said in shock.

"I'm afraid I will have to admit that I suppressed her memory Harry," he said seriously now, peering at Harry almost worriedly, "she retrieved the ingredients I needed for the antidote and I'm afraid I wasn't quite myself."

"Oh...right..." began Harry, feeling faintly worried Kitty had already been hexed since being here, but trusting Dumbledore's instincts nevertheless, "but sir, what happened? I mean, why were you ill?"

"Now that, I'm afraid, is a tale worthy of proper telling and I do not wish to diverge from the current, more important topic of conversation. Suffice to say, I acquired some spell damage that is not entirely unrelated to our present situation."

"What-" began Harry, frowning in puzzlement before Dumbledore held up a hand.

"All in good time Harry. Now," he said, fixing him with a penetrating look, "it seems I wasn't the only one missing these past few weeks."

Harry cringed inwardly, he'd almost forgotten about that in all the drama. Dumbledore knew none of the details as the Order and Ron and Hermione did. He stomach dropped.

"I guess not sir," agreed Harry awkwardly, staring at the blankets so he wouldn't have to see his mentors disappointment.

There was a brief silence and Harry, if possible, felt even worse.

"I cannot pretend that what you did wasn't foolish and dangerous," he began and Harry's cheeks burned with shame.

"I know-" he said hastily.

“But, understandable nonetheless.”

“I know, I’m sorr - what?” Harry asked, completely thrown off track.

“In the circumstances, I can understand why you did what you did,” Dumbledore told him, eyes alight with amusement as Harry mouthed at him wordlessly.

“But I put myself in danger!” he protested loudly.

“But at least you recognise the fact,” he told him warmly, “you’ve learned a valuable lesson Harry.”

“But sir...” he said, unable to quite grasp why Dumbledore was so forgiving or why he was trying to get himself into trouble, “you do know that I ran away don’t you? For weeks.”

“Harry, as much as you may struggle to believe, I myself was young once,” smile Dumbledore, wistful look on his face, “and in love. People, I tend to find, greatly underestimate the power of love, as I have told you on many occasions now.”

Harry flushed darkly, looking down at Kitty. He was very glad she couldn’t hear him sounding like a fool.

“Do you know I once ran away myself?” he added conversationally.

“Wha - Really?” Harry asked in amazement.

“Oh yes, I spent the summer before my sixth year living with a travelling circus in the muggle world,” he said, sighing happily at his recollections, “she was a fortune teller and I...I was a circus strongman.”

Harry couldn’t help it, the impressive tone Dumbledore had said this in mixed with his twinkling eyes and grin caused Harry to burst out in laughter. The Headmaster merely tried to look stern before chuckling with Harry too.



“Why did you do that Sir?!” asked Harry, amazed now.

“I was headstrong and overly certain of myself and besides, there’s no rhyme or reason when it comes to love Harry,” Dumbledore told him, “only leopard skin loincloths and bottlebrush moustaches.”

Harry laughed again, trying to imagine a 16 year old Dumbledore dressed as Tarzan, lifting weights for a muggle crowd.

“I didn’t do anything that exciting I’m afraid Professor,” Harry grinned finally.

“Nonsense Harry,” brushed off Dumbledore, “the way Kitty tells it your few weeks away have been the most exciting of her life.”

Harry was so surprised at what she’d said that he didn’t even realise Dumbledore had called her by her chosen name - no one except for Harry had ever called her Kitty.

“She said that?” asked Harry, amazed further still, “When?”

“Before we brewed the antidote she saw fit to look after me, as it were. She spent a good deal of that time talking about you and your exploits together. Oh yes, your daring escape from her stepfather, flatmates from hell, your intense dislike of horror movies?” he said airily, before giving Harry a warm smile, “McDonald’s also seemed to feature heavily.”

“Most of the time I was terrified to be honest sir,” Harry admitted, before suddenly catching himself and wondering why he’d divulged such a thing.

“That I can understand too Harry,” nodded Dumbledore, “we have both been plagued by Voldemort this summer. Yet I feel that you were perhaps most scared of her discovering your secret?”

Harry nodded wordlessly, almost eager to hear Dumbledore’s advice, it was always such a comfort to him.

“It is true that many muggles find the news very hard to deal with, some cannot deal with it at all,” he said with heavy sigh now, “but something tells me you would have been better off telling her sooner.”

“I was going to sir,” Harry said quickly, willing him to understand, “the day we were caught, I was minutes away from telling her...but in the end it was Voldemort who broke the news to her.”

Dumbledore nodded looking unsurprised, as if he knew this already and looked out of the window for some time. Harry wondered what was going through the old mans mind.

“Harry, do you regret running away?”

Harry looked in Dumbledore's eyes, knowing that if he felt like it he could just have used legillimens to find this answer, but chose not to. Harry was also encouraged by the fact that the headmaster had divulged a little of his secret history to him and felt that maybe he deserved the truth.

“No,” he replied, looking down at Kitty once again, “only being caught.”

“Do you know what Harry?” Dumbledore asked back, “I am infinitely glad that is your answer.”

Harry smiled shyly, he was a little unsure of what this meant.

“Kitty is a highly intelligent young woman,” he told Harry suddenly, “resourceful, talented but most of all loyal. And not only did she save your life, and mine, but also every single person that would have fallen foul of the numerous Death Eaters she's managed to name. The long and the short of it is Harry, I couldn't have asked for anybody more worthy and more willing for you to bestow your love upon.”

“I - Thank you sir,” Harry stuttered, shocked.

“She also has excellent taste in socks,” he added.

Harry chuckled as Dumbledore lifted the hem of his spangled robes to show him Kitty’s old knee high, orange and black striped socks.

“You’ve been waiting a long time for them sir,” he noted and Dumbledore gave Harry a look that said they’d just shared a private joke.

Harry remembered most vividly the night in his first year, when he was visiting his family in the Mirror of Erised, when Dumbledore had told him the thing his heart desired most, was a pair of thick socks. He’d never really figured out if he’d been lying at this suggestion.

“So Harry, now you have experienced life as a ‘normal’ teenager,” he suggested curiously, “what do you think?”

Harry thought of all the movies he’d watched, the take away meals, the television, clubbing, shopping in town, lazy afternoons spent soaking up the sun in open air cafes.

“I’m glad that I can change my hair colour back now,” he said, Dumbledore chuckling, “and that I don’t have to worry about what I say.”

“Magic does have its upsides, that’s true,” he nodded wisely, “even if we haven’t managed to create such delightful inventions as socks with individual toes.”

Harry nodded. He felt a million times better already, Dumbledore had somehow made him feel like he wasn’t actually going mad, that running away and assuming a new identity was perfectly normal, that Kitty wasn’t such a bad thing. Everyone else seemed to think he’d temporarily lost his mind.

“Thank you sir,” he blurted out suddenly, unaware that it had been on his mind, “for saving Kitty.”

“They were acting foolishly,” he said at once, a tone of cold disapproval entering his voice, “and as for Kitty, she was prepared to make the ultimate sacrifice, to save you by killing herself.”

“I know,” Harry said through a tight throat, feeling a cold shiver chase down his spine as he remembered the days events, “I’m finding it hard to cope...with the feeling sir.”

“Ah, as for that Harry, I don’t think we ever learn to cope,” he said wisely, “only learn to muddle on. But I understand how difficult it must be for you...”

“But...but I feel so guilty sir!” he burst out, “she was going to do that...for me...I don’t understand why?”

“Kitty told me how you tried to bargain with Voldemort,” he said seriously, peering over his half moon spectacles at Harry, “‘Let her go...I’ll stay, you can have me’ I think were her exact words.”

“Well, yes,” said Harry quickly, “but he was going to hurt her!”

“How is it any different Harry?” he asked, strange glimmer of pride in his eyes, “you were willing to die, or worse, to save her?”

“Yes...” he said slowly, but somehow it just didn’t feel the same, “but it was so obvious for me to do that! She needn’t have!”

“Ah, that Harry, is where I think you may be wrong...” he said, smiling widely now, “and maybe that’s something for you to talk to Kitty about. Love, as I say, can make you do incredible things.”

“And stupid things,” Harry said, still thinking about Kitty’s failed suicide attempt.

“You mother made the same sacrifice Harry, and that was never ‘stupid’. Kitty knew you were important, not just to us or the magical world, but to her, and that’s not foolish either. That kind of love, that

kind of loyalty, is your greatest weapon,” Dumbledore said, glittering blue eyes boring deep into his now, “do you understand?”

Harry wanted to say no, that he didn’t understand. How could that be the only thing that he could fight against Voldemort with, the most evil wizard of their time? When he was so powerful and all Harry had were emotions?

“Always questioning authority as usual I see Harry,” he said with a slight smile, obviously guessing, or reading, his thoughts, “but I want you to think about this very carefully, because the realisation of this knowledge will make your life so much easier, and perhaps, your future won’t seem as scary as it does now?”

Harry listened intently, feeling as if he were on the edge of a very high precipice, and someone had just thrown him a rope.

“You’ve met Voldemort many times now, have you not? Indeed, save for his Death Eaters I think we are the only two wizards in the world who have escaped alive, and in our own way, perhaps made things a little more difficult for him. Now, I want you to tell me, what saved you, every time you got away, what saved you?”

“Well my mother’s spell the first time?” he began hesitantly, not quite sure what Dumbledore wanted, “And then with Quirell it was the same thing...Fawkes saved me in the Chamber...My parents in the prior incantem, the Order last month...and Kitty.”

“And you still can’t see the connection?” he asked, eyes glimmering now, “We already discussed this on the fateful night last month?”

“It’s always my friends, or my family?” he suggested, a little disheartened by this.

“I think you underestimate the role that you play Harry, to survive up to the point where your enviable auxiliary comes into play,” Dumbledore told him, “but these people, your friends, your family, your loved ones...they’re your greatest strength, your biggest asset.”

“But that means I can’t do it on my own?” he said glumly, “That someone’s always going to have to get hurt or die for me, when I can’t do anything anyway?”

“I did not say this was your only power Harry, but we are at war, and you and I are in the very centre of it. People get hurt and people die, not because of you or I, but because they believe that it will make a difference, they know what is happening is wrong and they are willing to do everything to preserve what we have. You must remember Harry, if you don't stand for something, you will fall for something. People who do nothing, who believe it is not their war, are not less likely to come into conflict.”

“But Sirius died because of me, because he wanted to save me!” Harry protested, feeling the familiar hand constricting his heart.

“Sirius died fighting for what he believed in Harry, because he always despised the Dark Arts, Voldemort, and his family for their allegiance, because he stood for something. He was there, he saw that you were still alive, that the Order were flocking in, but still he stayed, to join the good fight. To make the stand. To let Voldemort and his supporters know that this land is defended and that our way of life will not be broken by him, or any other dark power which comes along.”

Harry had been nodding slowly throughout Dumbledore’s speech. He had known all this of course, in some small part of his mind, but he always hated himself for thinking it, because it felt like shifting the blame away from him. For a long moment he stared at the blanket ahead of him, thinking about Sirius, about Kitty, about love...

“Sir,” Harry began tentatively, “Can I ask you a question?”

“Of course Harry,” he replied warmly.

“Is Sirius dead?”

Dumbledore gave him a characteristically piercing look, before giving the slightest nod of his head.

“Yes Harry.”

Harry, despite fully expecting this answer, was still surprised when he heard the words. He'd expected some tiny glimmer of hope...some small loophole. But you can't cheat death he thought to himself grimly, studying the blankets of his bed now, even Voldemort would die one day...

“I got a letter,” he blurted out so suddenly he surprised himself, “this summer...”

Dumbledore shifted slightly a fixed Harry with another searching look, “What kind of letter?”

“From an Unspeakable...he said he had spoken to Sirius...” he mumbled, realising now how foolish how he was sounding.

Like a lost little child.

“I see,” sighed Dumbledore, sitting back slightly and thinking for a moment, “this wouldn't happen to be Antonius Quibell by any chance, would it?”

“Yes!” gasped Harry, sitting up and staring at Dumbledore excitedly now, “You know him?”

“Oh yes, I've known Antonius for many a year now, more than I care to remember in fact...” he stated, before give a slight shake of his head, “Harry, Antonius does indeed work in the Department of Mysteries...it's his job to study and protect the Veil.”

“But he's spoken to Sirius!” Harry exclaimed once more, impossibly excited, “That means he-”

“Harry, I must stop you there. Antonius had worked with the Ministry for nearly three hundred years,” Dumbledore said, before noticing his expression and adding, “he's a ghost, Harry. He's the only one who can study the Veil, because it would kill anyone else.”

“But why?”

“Harry, the Veil is an incredibly powerful magical object and no one knows where it comes from. That’s why we study it, but we have known for many years that anyone that goes into the Veil can never come back out. It was used in times gone by when the Wizengamot still had the death sentence. It is a portal, if you will, into what, we do not know. But ghosts can traverse some way into it and attempt to converse to those within it.”

“So Sirius is trapped in there?” Harry asked in a dull voice.

“I don’t believe so Harry. It is my belief that the Veil represents the thinning of the boundary between life and what comes next...The great unknown which some people chose never to explore, remaining earth bound.”

“Like Nearly Headless Nick?” Harry said, feeling dispirited.

“Yes, like Nick. The Veil has been there for hundreds of years, perhaps even thousands,” Dumbledore explained, “and before the Veil was built, that area was already known in legend for its powers. I know it is difficult for us to comprehend what happens when our bodies die, I know we’ve tried for many thousands of years to make sense of it. But I don’t believe we ever will.

“But he can still talk!” Harry struggled, sitting up and gazing desperately at the Headmaster, “He told Quibell all about me...So he-”

“Harry,” said Dumbledore steadily, and Harry fell silent instantly, he knew he was being childish, “Sirius is gone. I understand how hard this is for you to understand, but he’s not going to be coming back, no matter how desperately we want it to be so.”

Harry dropped his gaze to his blanket, nodding heavily. He knew it, it just didn’t make it any easier to believe.



“Do you remember telling me about the first time you visited that Graveyard and faced Voldemort?”

Harry nodded mutely.

“And do you remember telling me the peculiar incident that occurred when your sister wands connected?”

“Yes sir.”

“You saw your parents that night, despite the fact they had been gone for 13 years. They were merely echoes of the past, shadows of life preserved within the spell. This is just the same Harry,” he said gently, willing him to understand, “Sirius is gone, but part of him survives within the Veil. But it is not him Harry, it is merely a reflection...an imitation of life and knowledge.”

“How do you know?” Harry asked in a small voice.

“He’s not trapped Harry. Quibell would tell you the same thing. He would have wanted to explain to you what the veil is and how it works.”

“Why?” he demanded, feeling somehow angry - at himself, Dumbledore, or perhaps Quibell for putting these thoughts in his head?

“No doubt Antonius is desperate to learn more about the Veil, Sirius is the first person to traverse through it in man years. But it is my guess that he is acting only as a messenger, from Sirius, he must know how you’d feel about what happened, but he also knew you’re importance, and that you mustn’t let this affect you.”

“How can I not let it affect me?” Harry burst out, “Sirius is dead!”

“Yes he is Harry,” replied Dumbledore calmly, “but you didn’t kill him. Just as you didn’t kill your parents, or Cedric, or Kitty’s brother. It doesn’t diminish the loss I know, but you can channel it Harry,

because you understand that there has been losses, and there will be many more to come until Voldemort is stopped.”

“And that’s my job.” Harry stated flatly.

In a way he understood everything Dumbledore had said, it made sense - he knew it did...but he still couldn’t quite believe it.

“Yes,” replied Dumbledore evenly.

“But I can’t do it Sir, I feel...powerless compared to him.”

“You know you’re not. You have the ability for great power Harry, and I hope I will be able to assist in you some small way with the greatest weapon that I could give you.”

“What’s that?” he asked, looking up hopefully.

“Knowledge Harry,” he said simply, “together we are going to learn, and together we may finally solve the riddle of how to kill an immortal.”

Harry stared at him open mouthed, a long forgotten feeling coursing through his veins as he looked into the old mans blue eyes.

Hope.

Kitty was awoken by bright sunlight shining down on her face and for a moment she smiled pleasantly to herself, she felt well rested, albeit slightly groggy. As she pulled her eyes open she stretched, surprised to find someone’s hand intertwined with her own. She rolled over and saw Harry sat at her bedside, head resting on her blanket as he slept.

She smiled slightly and gently pulled her hand out of his to rub her head - she had a throbbing pain developing in her temple that was already threatening her good mood. As if sensing her movement, Harry began to stir and after pulling his own eyes open blearily, he saw Kitty was awake and burst into the biggest, happiest grin Kitty had ever seen on a person.

“Pleased to see me?” she asked dryly, voice still thick from sleep.

It seemed he must have been because without another word he stood up and kissed her fiercely, hands threading through her hair. When he broke away he didn’t draw back but merely studied her features intently, as if looking for something.

“Good morning to you too stranger,” she said, looking at him oddly, “if I knew that was the greeting I’d have every morning I’d always have you guarding me.”

He merely grinned widely and kissed her as if he hadn’t seen her for months. Instead of enjoying it however, Kitty began to feel the stirrings of uneasiness in her heart. By the time he pulled away a second time she was feeling almost panicked.

“What is it?” she asked anxiously, “What’s happened?”

She noticed the way his eyes clouded slightly but tried to hide it by smiling once more.

“Harry?” she demanded as she sat up, feeling scared now, “What’s wrong? Why are you out of bed? Why...”

She broke off with a yelp of pain as she clutched the side of her head where her headache had started to sting, “...and why does my head kill?”

“Drink this first,” Harry said, unnatural smile disappearing now as she handed him a small glass vial.

Instinctively and without question she drank it and almost immediately the pain in her head stopped. For a moment she just stared ahead, shocked at the instant relief, before turning to look at Harry, questioningly.

“Do you remember yesterday?” he asked her gently, surprising her by reaching out and tucking her braids behind her ears tenderly.

“No...what-” she began to ask, before tailing away.

Something did happen yesterday she realised. Something big...she cast her mind back, she remembered something about her step-brother, and fighting with Hermione and then what? It had all happened so quickly, Remus was ill and she'd gone to see Tonks, but someone had wanted to talk to her first...No that wasn't it, they'd tried to take her...and she fought with them, and then...

“The gun...Oh my God Harry...Oh my God the gun!”

Her heart exploded in terror, suddenly she could feel the pain, the desperation, the grief of yesterday. She could remember there was no way out, she'd been trapped, and Harry was going to be killed, because of her.

She could never remember what she said or did in those few moments after the realisation, all she could remember was the screaming and the crying and fighting tooth and claw to get away. What seemed like hours later she finally resurfaced in her own mind to find Harry was holding her tightly, whispering in a calming voice into her ear, stroking her hair.

“ You're not dead,” he was promising her, “we're ok...we're together...we'll always be together...you're not dead...”

Since Harry has persuaded the Matron to let him out of his bed, he hadn't returned and now forced himself to move and walk around first the Hospital Wing, then the corridors, and finally outside. He was tired of being cooped up inside and needed the fresh air now to calm his mind.

One day after Kitty had awoken and realised what had happened, he found himself walking around the grounds of the castle with Ron and Hermione, both of whom were offering silent support and company. He thought he may have forgotten how to speak now, the past day had been the hardest he thought he'd ever faced. Kitty, who had become hysterical after waking up was finally persuaded to take another sleeping draught and had awoken in the morning distant and uncommunicative.

“It’s not surprising Harry,” Hermione was telling him as they approached the lake, “she thought she’d killed herself and then she wakes up...She’s just confused...”

Harry didn’t reply and Hermione must have realised how unhelpful her comment was because she looked over to Ron anxiously.

“Give her some time mate,” Ron tried, half slapping, half patting Harry on the back.

“We don’t have time,” Harry replied.

It was true, the 1st of September was rapidly approaching now and Harry was facing the prospect of either losing Kitty all over again or leaving the school.

“There’s still options-” Hermione began but Harry merely cut in.

“I don’t really feel like talking about this now,” he said, shoving his hands deeper inside his pockets, “you know?”

“We understand Harry,” Hermione replied carefully, “but we just want you to know it’s going to be alright...”

“Dumbledore will think of something,” Ron agreed bracingly, “and you know it’ll be the best we can do. He won’t let anything happen to her now.”

“None of us will,” Hermione supplied earnestly, “I’m sure if even Remus had been awake yesterday none of this would have happened, both he and Tonks have done everything they can to help her since she’s arrived.”

Harry, who was slightly surprised about this, said nothing.

“Tonks told me that nobody in the Ministry knows anything about her now,” Hermione confided in him, looking a little apprehensive, “It’s seems Moody and the others have erased all knowledge of her.”

“Don’t talk to me about them,” Harry replied shortly, they were the last thing he wasn’t to hear about.

“But in a way it helps Harry,” Hermione said tentatively, before rushing to defend herself at the look on Harry’s face, “obviously not what they did here! I just mean, it’s good to have the Ministry off our backs, they were right in saying that they had guidelines they have to follow, they’d just try and take over, as usual.”

“Well it’s a good thing they did try and dispose of her then, wasn’t it?” Harry asked sarcastically.

Hermione merely frowned, “I’ve done some reading into the muggle protection laws and Moody was right, they can obliviate witnesses and give them new memories. They even have a special fund for people widowed or injured in magic-related incidents which is paid to them without them knowing.”

Harry merely scoffed.

“Well that’s good of them,” he laughed nastily, “bam there goes your family member, here’s some new memories about how they were killed by an electrical fault and some sneaky blood money along the way! It’s pathetic.”

Hermione shot Ron a look that clearly said ‘help me out here.’

“It is pathetic,” he shrugged, “but since when have the Ministry been noted for their intelligence or compassion? Look at who they sent to teach us last year! Anyway, like you said, this wasn’t even anything to do with the Ministry, just them wanting to take over since Dumbledore was out of the picture.”

“Well Fudge will get his comeuppance,” Harry said angrily, “and the Aurors will soon learn that blasting away peoples memories doesn’t work! Look at what happened to Bertha Jorkins, everyone knows memory charms can be broken!”

“I bet Fudge has already learned his lesson,” said Ron grimly, “he was kicked out last night, unanimous vote of no-confidence dad said.”

Harry was sidetracked by this for one moment, “So who’s in charge?”

“Rufus Scrimgeour,” Ron replied, “an Auror - and a top class one too, or so my dad says.”

“Yeah, well, you’re dad reckoned Moody was great too,” he said bitterly, feeling his old admiration for Aurors waning slightly.

“Anyway,” cut in Hermione hurriedly, “like I said, we don’t have to worry about the Aurors or the Ministry any more, Tonks told me she’s tidying up any loose ends over there today.”

“I’d be careful if I were her,” Ron said, frowning slightly, “she’s supposed to be keeping a low profile at the moment.”

“Why?” Harry asked.

“I, er, overheard Bill talking to her last night on the Extendable Ears, apparently she’s got big money problems with Gringotts,” Ron said, “they’ve got Goblins out looking for her and everything.”

“Why?” demanded Hermione, looking shocked and worried by the news.

“Debt I should imagine,” Ron said and Harry suddenly remembered how ill and harassed the usual bright and bubbly Tonks had seemed the past few days, “I guess this is why she’d been living with that friend of hers and started working at Azkaban.”

“She’s working at Azkaban!” Harry exclaimed in surprise, he had a sudden flash of insight into how desperate she must have been to work there.

“And that’s why she’s been so ill then?” Hermione guessed, looking upset, “why she collapsed last week?”

“I guess so,” Ron said, before looking around him conspiratorially, “I also overheard Bill talking Charlie about Professor Lupin...apparently the reason he came in yesterday was because he took part in some experiment for finding a cure to being a werewolf that went wrong.”

“Why?” demanded Harry and Hermione in unison.

“For a hefty amount of gold by the sound of it,” Ron replied.

“Is everyone suffering from money problems or something?” Hermione asked, looking slightly sickened by the idea of lycanthropy experiments.

“I don’t think so, Charlie said the Professor gave all the gold to Tonks.”

Both Harry and Hermione paused for a moment in surprise.

“I guess that makes sense,” Hermione said slowly, “Professor Lupin and Tonks are good friends.”

“Are they?” asked Harry in surprise, “I didn’t know that.”

“Well they’ve been together a lot over the summer,” Ron said, shooting a sideways glance at Hermione, “I think they’ve been helping each other over, you know, Sirius and everything. They’ve both been a little...different since then.”

Harry was silent for a moment before nodding to himself, “Well, that makes sense...they were best friends, and Tonks is his cousin...”

“I think she might blame herself a little over what happened too,” Hermione said, emboldened by Harry’s willingness to talk about Sirius, “you know, survivors guilt. And now she must feel terrible for Professor Lupin getting ill for her.”

Harry thought about this too himself. He had been too busy concentrating on his own feeling he forgot there were other people



who knew and loved Sirius, people who'd miss him. Suddenly he felt a new connection with everyone, one that he'd forgotten or lost over the summer, that feeling of belonging to a group and to a place. Somewhere where everything was shared. And right now he felt like he had to share this with his friends, that keeping things to himself hadn't worked.

So he decided to tell Ron and Hermione everything. About how he felt coming back from the Ministry that night, about the Prophecy and his guilt, his summer and the letter from Quibell. He told them how depressed he'd been until he met Kitty, why they ran and away and everything they did together until they were captured. He felt like his throat was raw and he'd been talking for hours by the time he'd finished. And when he did he found that his heart seemed a little bit lighter, that at least they knew now why he'd done what he did, and what Kitty meant to him now.

When he finished Hermione, who like Ron had listened without interruption merely wrapped her arms around him and hugged him tightly.

"Oh Harry," she sniffed, sounding partly distressed, partly resolute, "I'm so sorry about everything..."

"I should be apologising to you," he replied glumly, "for making you worry too."

"No need," Ron said from his side, "we should have known."

"But now we can get through this...together, can't we?" Hermione asked, "like we always do, eventually?"

Harry nodded, smiling slightly to himself, "Eventually."

"Come hell or high water, giant chess sets or dirty great snakes," Ron said jokingly, slinging his arms around Harry's shoulder as Hermione pulled away.

“Come Dementors or Blast Ended Skrewts,” Hermione joined in, smile on her face too now.

“Come evil DADA toads or Ministry decrees,” Harry finished, smirking slightly.

“And we’re going to make sure nothing happens to Cathy, even if we have to hide her in the Room of Requirement all year,” Ron finishes with a smug look on his face.

“And what’s more,” finished Hermione with the trump card, “we might even do it with some excellent NEWT grades to show for it too!” That afternoon Harry felt, despite all the troubles and turmoil’s of the past few months, that a weight had been lifted off his shoulders. He knew that there was still trouble ahead, that he may soon lose Kitty, but he felt an unreasonable optimism, as if the solution was just around the corner if he could only grasp it. Perhaps it was Dumbledore being back, or knowing the Ron, Hermione, Tonks and Professor Lupin were all on his side that had left him feeling hopeful.

It was more than could be said for Kitty, who had asked Harry to take her to Dumbledore that morning and who still hadn’t returned by the afternoon. Harry worried and fretted about this with Hermione and Ron, still wearing a track around the lake as the came up with more and more elaborate plots to hide Kitty at Hogwarts.

And then, as he saw Tonks walking through the gates of Hogwarts, obviously having apparated just outside the boundaries, something clicked into place.

“I’ll see you later guys,” he said quickly, before walking over to Tonks, who looked pale and sickly.

She saw him approaching and gave a slight wave, tripping over a loose pebble and having to steady herself suddenly.

“Wotcher Harry,” she said as he arrived at her side, “how are you?”

“Fine,” he said, a little breathless himself from the exertion, “and you?”

“Never better,” she said dryly, “how’s Cathy?”

They continued to exchange pleasantries and light conversation for some time before Tonks stopped and fixed Harry with a knowing look.

“What’s on your mind Harry?” she asked, “I can tell you’re thinking about something.”

“I just er, wanted to say thank you, for everything you’ve done,” he said, feeling slightly self-conscious, “for helping Kitty.”

“No problem,” she said easily, grinning at Harry slightly, “but something tells me that’s not it.”

“It’s just...I wanted to talk to you about Sirius,” he began, feeling sorry he mentioned it when her happy expression slid off her face.

“Oh, well, of course,” she said, automatically turning and beginning to walk the same path around the lake he’d been using all day, “what do you want to talk about?”

“Well...I just wondered if you miss him?” he began, cursing himself for sounding stupid.

“Of course I do Harry,” she replied heavily, carefully picking her way across the shale of the shoreline, “we all do.”

“I know,” he replied hastily, wondering how to explain himself properly, “but when he...that night I mean, did you always, believe, what happened?”

“Believe?”

“Did you really think he died?” he asked straight out.

She gave a heavy sigh and stopped walking, turning to face him.

“Harry, no one ever wants to believe that their loved ones can die,” she began with some difficulty, “but it’s practically the one thing we can be certain of in our life. But I understand why you’re asking me this question, because you never knew what the Veil was.”

“But you did?” he asked, “You knew it was used for the death sentence?”

“Yes.”

“I got a letter from Antonius Quibell this summer, about Sirius. I wanted to help him, rescue him, but now I guess I know better.”

Tonks didn’t seem confused by the mention of the letter or the Unspeakable, only slightly surprised.

“Did he really? Well, I understand why you’d want to do that Harry...I’d probably do the same in your situation. But sooner or later we all have to face the truth and accept the consequences. None of us are going to be seeing Sirius for a while I hope.”

Harry nodded glumly.

“We didn’t have enough time did we?” he asked her.

“There never is,” she replied sadly, “there’s so much I wished we’d talked about wish we’d done...it was nice to finally have a family member that didn’t come with a Dark Mark as standard.”

Harry smiled slightly, thinking about the Black family tree and the small burnt patches both she and his Godfather possessed.

“My mum and dad always liked Sirius...” she said sadly, “when your parents died and it came out that it was him...I think it broke my poor mothers heart. She always told us how glad she was we’d left them all behind, because even Sirius turned out bad in the end...”

“Does she know now?” Harry asked her, feeling somehow that Sirius needed to know this.

“Perhaps,” she shrugged, looking even more glum now than when he’d first greeted her, “she’s not too well Harry, so, who knows? I’m sure in her mind Sirius is still the little toddler that set fire to the curtains.”

“Oh,” he said, feeling awful now for upsetting her, “I’m sorry - I didn’t know that...”

“Well, we’ve all got our crosses to bear haven’t we?” she shrugged dismissively, “I guess there’s no point dwelling on the past now is there? It just goes to show that life’s short and you should take your chances while you can.”

“Yeah I guess. I suppose I already took mine this summer...what’s yours?” Harry asked, before realising what a stupid and personal question that was.

She merely flashed him a grin, “That would be telling, but I think I’ll try and sort out my present before making plans for the future.”

Harry thought about what Ron had told him about Tonks being in trouble with the goblins and everything she’d done for both himself and Kitty that summer, he knew what he was doing was right, but he debated about how he was going to say it. He didn’t know Tonks that well, but reasoned he’d always got on well with her.

“Tonks, I heard about your Gringotts problem,” he blurted out.

She stopped in her tracks, pausing for a moment before looking at him. And when she did she seemed to have lost some of her cheerful, friendly aura.

“Did you now?” she asked carefully, “I forgot how fast news travels around here.”

“I’m sorry, I know it’s none of my business, but I wanted to help.”

“That’s very sweet Harry,” she said, already turning away, “but I don’t really think there’s anything you can do, so...”

“No there’s nothing I can do,” he said hastily, rushing to catch her up, “but there is something Sirius could do!”

“What are you talking about Harry?” she demanded irritably, stopping once more and fixing him with an angry look.

“Did you know that when Sirius died I inherited everything from him?” he said in a rush, “Grimmauld House, his possessions, everything.”

She looked at him in surprise for a moment.

“No...I didn’t know that...” she began, “although I guess it makes sense he’d have wanted to support you in any way that he could.”

“Well, I don’t want it,” Harry replied stoutly, stomach squirming once more at the thought of the chest full of gold sitting by his bedside.

“What do you mean you don’t want it?” she laughed doubtfully.

“I mean I don’t want any of it,” Harry replied, wondering if she’d understand why, “I’ve already given the house to the Order but I think you should have the money.”

“What?!” she demanded incredulously, before laughing once more in disbelief, “yeah right!”

“I’m serious,” he said, once she turned to go, still chuckling to herself.

“Harry, you can’t run around giving away hundreds of galleons to everyone!” she told him in a tone that said she clearly didn’t believe a word he was saying and perhaps even thought him slightly delusional.

“Firstly, I’m not running around, secondly, it’s not everyone it’s only you and thirdly, it’s not hundreds of galleons, it’s 12,500.”

“Twelve thousand...” she began faintly, gaping at him with a dumbfounded expression on her face before she snapped out of it, “Harry, you can’t give that money away! Sirius wanted you to have it...”

“I don’t want it and I’ve got plenty of gold already, more than I’ll ever need and you need it,” he pointed out.

“Yeah well, plenty of other people need gold too but that doesn’t mean you can just give-” she began weakly.

“Listen Tonks, you’re Sirius’ cousin, your family, and I know that if he were here now he wouldn’t want you to be in trouble with goblins and living on friends sofas,” Harry said, still finding it difficult talking about Sirius in the past tense.

“Harry,” she began weakly, “even so...I can’t accept it...”

“Why not? I’m giving it to you! Think of it as a present for helping me and Kitty out,” he said steadily.

She was still protesting when he drew his wand and summoned the trunk, which arrived a few moments later and fell to the floor in front of her with a rich sounding clink. She didn’t make any move towards the box and Harry gave a sigh.

“Either accept it as a gift or I’ll bewitch it to follow you around for all eternity,” he said wearily.

“But I can’t...” she replied feebly.

“Tonks,” Harry said pleadingly, attempting to make her understand, “I need you take this alright?”

“Why?” she whispered, looking anxious at how desperately she wanted to say yes.

“He wouldn’t want you working there,” he said quietly, “and I need to feel like some good came of this. Take it.”

“Harry-”

“Please.”

After a moment she took a hitched breath before nodding slightly. Harry gave her a massive grin before she quite unexpectedly threw her arms around his neck and gave him a choking, ecstatic hug.

“Thank you Harry! You’ve got no idea what this means to me!” she gushed, looking suddenly a lot younger and more like the Tonks he’d first met.

“No problem,” he laughed dryly, rubbing his crushed windpipe.

When she stepped backwards she looked flushed with excitement and was practically hopping from foot to foot.

“I can’t believe I’m doing this!” she exclaimed, looking as if she wanted to feel bad but couldn’t quite manage it, “I’ve got to go and tell Remus!”

“Ok, bye!” Harry laughed, watching Tonks grin widely and turn to hurry into the castle.

“Bye Harry!”

Harry couldn’t help but think Sirius would approve, wherever he was and he knew that in his heart it was the right thing to do. For all Sirius’ despairing talk of bloodlines, he knew that he wouldn’t have let Tonks go without.



“Why’s she looking so happy?” Ron asked him when he joined the two once more.

“Long story,” Harry shrugged squinting up into the sky.

He was worried to see the sun was setting and he still hadn’t really seen Kitty.

Hermione must have noticed this because she suggested tentatively, “Maybe she’s finished now?”

“I hope so,” he replied, unable to quite put his finger on why this wasn’t entirely true.

“What do you think they’ve been talking about?” Ron asked them.

Harry had a pretty good idea - what happened in the Hospital Wing, what would be happening next week...

“I’m sure Dumbledore’s got everything planned,” Hermione said assuredly.

“Just like he planned to be missing-presumed-conferencing the past two months?” Ron asked sceptically before Hermione shot him a furious look and he added hastily, “But, you know he didn’t plan that and this he can...so...”

Hermione rolled her eyes at him.

“Anyway doesn’t she have college this year?” she asked Harry cautiously.

“I don’t think she passed her GCSEs so I don’t think so,” Harry remarked, he’d already thought of this.

“Oh,” she said, face falling, “well...I don’t know...”

“Does she need the GCs then?” asked Ron, clearly puzzled.

“It’s GCSEs Ron, and yes, she does,” sighed Hermione, “Isn’t there anything she wants to do though Harry?”

Harry thought about it for a moment but all he could remember was their plan to go on holiday to Cornwall and learn to surf and camp. Hardly a life plan. Trouble was, the whole basis of their relationship was never talking about the future, and now the whole world was trying to make them do it.

“Harry?” prompted Hermione.

“I don’t know,” he shrugged, feeling even more depressed at the idea, “I tried to get her to go to Art College once but she laughed it off.”

“That’s a good idea,” Ron said brightly, “I’ve seen those pictures she drew of the Death Eaters, they’re amazing - did you know some of them are being used as the official wanted posters?”

Harry was momentarily sidetracked by that thought.

“She hasn’t got the grades,” Hermione said, “anyway, let’s just wait and see what Dumbledore thinks...”

Dumbledore had been holding meetings in his office all day, meeting and greeting what seemed like hundreds of different witches and wizards who simply couldn’t live without seeing him instantly. Firstly there was the staff of Hogwarts, whom deserved the most explanation and who brought to his attention they were still without a Defence Against the Dark Arts professor. There was only a small pile of potential applicants, ranging from the hopelessly under qualified, the suspiciously overqualified to the just plain suspicious. However, Dumbledore only had one man in mind for the job and Professor Snape gratefully accepted the position in their private meeting.

Next came the meeting of the much diminished Order of the Phoenix, who had taken the summer’s events and losses harder than he expected. It was a testament to how bad things had become that

events such as the showdown in the Hospital Wing had been allowed to happen and he worried for the future.

He fielded a visit from the new Minister for Magic who seemed slightly angry that he had been ignoring his attempts at contact the past month, making him smile to himself knowingly. It didn't hurt to put the minister on guard, lest the same mistakes as the last administration be made again and it gave him ample opportunity to discover he knew nothing about Harry disappearance or Kitty's appearance.

His final meeting was the one he'd been expecting and least looking forward too. Kitty Earl, who had gone from being just another of the millions of muggles beyond their world, had suddenly been thrust into the very centre of a dangerous and deadly war. However, instead of shirking her duties, she had done more than any of them could ever imagine or thank her for. Yet now they were facing an impossible situation, where no solution would be the right one and the decision would never be easy.

He hadn't known what to expect of the girl, having only muddled memories of her help, but quickly understood why Harry both chose and cherished her. She was obviously confused about a great deal of things so much of their long discussion was spent explaining the current situation, the potted history of the war, whilst fielding a great many questions about the day-to-day workings of magic. He found it difficult to discern her true feelings on most things however, her expression was kept carefully neutral and a small legillimens foray gave nothing away. He could only rely on the knowledge of what he'd been told so far of her behaviour by Remus and Tonks and by remembering that only yesterday she had been driven to attempted suicide. He knew that her apparent curiosity with their legal system was merely a front for the deeper, more serious questions she had yet to find the courage to ask.

"Kitty," he began gently, deciding to answer the biggest unspoken question, "I'm afraid it's not possible for you to stay here at the school once term has started."

Her expression flickered for a moment and she hitched a breath, before merely nodding wordlessly, studying her fingernails intently, "Thought as much."

"But we can arrange for you to stay with family," he suggested, noting with surprise how well she hid her emotions from him, she was practically performing Occlumency without knowing it.

"I don't have any," she said in a flat voice, "my mom's dead."

"I'm sorry to hear that," he said sincerely, "and your father?"

She merely shrugged and he took it that this was not an option.

"I don't have any money to get a place either," she said finally, still refusing to make eye contact with him, "reckon you could get me a job too?"

She gave a slight laugh at her joke and Dumbledore leant forward in his chair, steepling his fingers and regarding her thoughtfully.

"Is that what you want to do?" he asked her, noticing the angry look in her eyes she been trying so careful to hide.

"Of course it's not!" she burst out angrily, "I don't want to move away! I don't want to get some crappy dead-end job and look forward to school holidays because it might be the one chance I get to see the person I love!"

"I understand," he replied calmly, ignoring her outburst.

"No you DON'T!" she countered furiously, "How can you? How can any of you! This is my life, not some inconvenient by-product of Harry running away! You can't just get rid of me!"

"We're not trying to get rid of you-"

“You are! But you can’t make me go!” she said almost desperately, “please don’t make me go...I haven’t got anyone else...”

“Kitty, you know that if there was any other way I would,” he told her.

“Make me magical then,” she demanded, crossing her arms.

“I’m afraid I can’t, you’re born magic.”

She frowned, “Well, write me in that big book - make me part of your world.”

Dumbledore stared at her for a moment, nonplussed.

“I’m sorry?”

“Your big book, you know, the magical census? Write me into it,” she elaborated, “make me a citizen or whatever you are, give me passport, naturalise me.”

He couldn’t help but frown at her for a moment, he understood what book she was talking about but hadn’t clue how she’d found out about it. Not many people were aware of its existence and even less about its location at Hogwarts.

“Are you talking about the Book of Names?” he asked curiously.

“About this big,” she asked impatiently, holding out her arms, “heavy as a concrete block?”

“How do you know about that book?”

She paused for a moment, frowning even more at him.

“That night we met?” she hinted finally, “you were halfway down the lawn, trying to give that book to that evil magpie...the one that seemed possessed? It was screeching like a banshee but you thought it sounded pretty...”

She trailed off as he stared at her, scattered memories flickering in his mind's eye, he vaguely recalled something about being outside, but it wasn't a magpie screeching, it was a beautiful phoenix song, calling to him.

He stood up at once, causing Kitty to jump as he began pacing the floor in agitation, "This magpie," he demanded swiftly, "what happened to it, what happened to the book."

"I threw stones at it until it left," he said, looking worried now at his sudden change of pace, "and the books still here...I put it in your cupboard in your bedroom..."

Without another word, he turned and pulled one of the books off his bookcase which unlocked the door to his bedroom and rushed in. Kitty was following hot on his heels as he began to open cupboards at random.

"It's this one," she said quickly, bending down to a small cupboard that usually only contained odd bits with no home.

She tugged the massive book out, placing it on the table beside her so he could see. Dumbledore bent down low over it, studying every inch of the massive cover, before beginning to flick through the pages.

"Is it ok?" she asked apprehensively a few minutes later, "I didn't mean to do anything to it..."

"It's fine," he said in relief, peering at her with a deep sense of pride, "you are astute as ever Kitty, it is indeed a census of sorts...it is a magical book, charmed to write down the name and location of every magical person in our world at the moment of their birth."

"So, why did the magpie want it?" she asked, before pausing and unexpectedly laughing, "I never thought I'd be saying that."

He smiled along with her, before growing more serious, "It is my suspicion that it was no magpie, most probably a Death Eater transfigured or Voldemort possessing the poor creature himself."

She blanched unexpectedly, before swallowing and steadying herself, "And, er, why does he want it?"

"For this," he replied, finger resting on one entry.

"Esmeralda Merryweather, The Cot, 1st Floor, Rose Cottage, Waybrook," she read out, squinting at the looped handwriting, "Daughter of Joseph and Esmeralda Merryweather nee Alcright - Born of Muggles."

She looked up, realisation dawning, "He wants to know who's 'Born of Muggles' and who's 'Pure of Blood?'"

Dumbledore nodded gravely, "Untold damage would have been caused if this book had fallen into Voldemort hands, and not just for the muggleborn's. I believe a great many wizards lie about their own heritage, even his followers."

"Just think of all those people..." she said, flicking through the book with an anxious expression on her face, "You should definitely hide this book better! Or just get rid of it, what if next time they managed to get it?"

"You're right, we should guard this better, but we cannot destroy it," he told her, carefully closing the book and tapping it with his wand. It glowed momentarily before becoming normal once more, "it is irreplaceable."

Kitty merely frowned and looked at the book as if it had personally offended her, he'd forgotten in all the excitement, the reason she had mentioned it in the first place.

"So I suppose it wouldn't work writing my name in it?" she asked half-heartedly.

“I’m afraid no one can write in it,” he said gently, “it doesn’t work like that.”

She nodded thoughtfully, tracing her finger across the leather embossing on the book, before dropping into the chair beside it.

“So what am I going to do?” she asked heavily, throwing up her arms.

“I’m afraid you already know the answer to that. But we will arrange everything for you and I dare say I could think of a few rather cunning ways to keep in contact with us here at the school,” he told her, sitting opposite her and fixing her with a piercing look.

She looked up desperately, “But I don’t want to leave pops.”

“I know, but sometimes we all have to make sacrifices for those we love,” he told her gently, patting her clasped hands as she blushed at her use of his nickname, “look upon this as a fresh start - you have a chance now to begin again and be who you want to be.”

He knew this was something that would appeal to her and for a moment he caught a glimpse of excitement in her eyes.

“Ok,” she said finally, expression as if she were signing her own death warrant, “I kind of always knew this was going to happen...I just wish we had more time...”

“Well you still have a week, I suggest you enjoy the time you do have,” he told her, unable to stop a knowing smile breaking out on his face, “I’m sure Harry and his friends will be only too happy to show you around the castle properly. Leave the worrying and planning to me.”

“Alright,” she said with a heavy shrug.

“Make the most of it,” he nodded, standing up to show her out.

“I will,” she replied glumly.



"Its treacle sponge for pudding tonight I believe," he added in the hope of getting a smile out of her, "there's no better place to start than a hearty meal."

"Guess not," she said, hand on the door knob to leave, "Pops...Can I...Can I ask you a question?"

"Of course Kitty," he said graciously.

"Do you think you made the right decision, stopping that gun yesterday?"

He regarded her for a long moment, taken aback by the question.

"Of course I do," he replied in a strong voice, "for all concerned."

"Just checking," she replied, stepping out onto the moving staircase.

Dumbledore watched her until she went out of sight, letting out a heavy sigh as he closed the door. He retreated to his desk, deep in thought about the situation and the new and disturbing revelations he'd discovered. He took a small, ugly gold ring out of the desk draw and examined its cracked black stone thoughtfully.

Kitty stared at the rough stone wall as she descended the moving staircase in her heart she knew Dumbledore was right. There was no better alternative, she'd have to move somewhere else, try and keep in contact with Harry, look forward to holidays and live her life without him...

It seemed impossible.

As if in answer to her thoughts, she had no sooner stepped in to the corridor than she was greeted by his familiar voice.

"There you are," he said, climbing to his feet from his position sat at the base of a suit of armour, "I thought I might have missed you."

“Here I am,” she said flatly, feeling a horribly painful squeeze in her heart as she looked at him - a few days time and this will never happen.

“How did it go?” he asked anxiously, standing in front of her awkwardly, “what did he say?”

“He said, make the most of this week,” she replied heavily, grimacing, “because that’s all we get.”

If possible the pain in her heart grew even more at the look on his face until she didn’t think she could stand it.

“Is that it?” he demanded.

She nodded, feeling the now-familiar tears beginning to sting her eyes.

“It’s not fair,” she gasped, “it’s not...”

Harry nodded wordlessly, stepping forward and wrapping her in a warm, safe embrace.

“It’s not,” he agreed quietly.

“I’m so fed up of all of this,” she sniffed angrily, “why can’t we just be happy?”

“Let’s try,” Harry said, pulling back and leaning his forehead against hers, “like Dumbledore said, we’ve got a week, we’re both still here, we’re both ok...”

“How can we when we know what’s coming?” she asked him, looking searchingly into his eyes.

“We need something to remember,” he countered, “something to look forward too.”

“I guess.”

He leant forward and planted a tender kiss on her lips, which she returned half-heartedly at first, before trying to do as he suggested and try and let go. It didn't take her long to loose herself in the kiss, relishing the way it made her heart flutter and her head swim, making her feel alive.

When they broke apart she couldn't help but give him a small smile, which he returned.

“If we're making moments to remember, I think we're going to need to practice that one a little bit more,” she joked half-heartedly.

“Good thinking,” he laughed, “shall we go for a wander?”

“I don't really feel like it,” she replied.

“Come on,” Harry begged, “it's got to be better than being in that Hospital Wing all the time.”

“Are you well enough?” she asked worriedly.

“Yes mum, stop stalling,” he replied, threading his fingers into hers, “now come on; I want to show you something.”

“Is it something weird and shocking?” she asked in a suspicious voice, as he guided them down the corridor.

“Sort of,” he said, laughing at her groan of protest.

“I'm sick of learning new things,” she told him, “I want to drop a bombshell on you...you do know I'm an alien, didn't you?”

“Ha ha, very funny,” he said as they emerged into the chilly corridor.

They shuffled along in relative quiet for a while and Harry tried to fill the silence by explaining about the paintings or secret passageways.

He was only trying to include her but he sometimes felt the more he tried to explain, the more he talked about magic, the further detached she seemed to become. By the time they'd reached the staircase to the seventh floor, she was limiting their conversation to one word answers.

"Have you been up here before?" he asked, wincing slightly as his stomach gave a twinge of pain.

"No," she replied after a moment, "how're you feeling?"

"A little achey," he admitted, disheartened by her tone - she was getting in a mood.

"You shouldn't be walking about," she told him sternly, reminding him at once of Hermione.

"I'm fine," he assured her, rubbing her stomach slightly nevertheless, "got to start getting about sometime - feel like I've been stuck in that hospital for months.

"Mmm," was all she said and Harry glanced across at her.

She was staring at a staircase below them, which was shifting position noisily, with a look of alarm on her face. Great, he thought bitterly...

"So," he said hastily, trying to draw her away from the stairs and back to him, "er..."

Harry couldn't think of anything to say and he gave a sigh, falling into silent worry as he tried to imagine what Kitty was feeling right now. If someone had dropped all this on him, would he be coping as well as she was trying? Definitely not, and sometimes he got the feeling she was a little too accepting of all the surprises.

They reached the seventh floor corridor and when they reached the top of the stairs Harry paused and gave her a worried look.

“Kitty...were you happy when you woke up last night?” he asked her bluntly.

“Of course I was,” she replied flatly.

“So why don’t you look it?” he asked her, “Why does it feel like you wish Dumbledore had never turned up.”

“I don’t really think that,” she told him sincerely turning to him with a sad look in her eyes, “I just think, maybe it would have been easier.”

“Who for?” he demanded, sounding angry even though he wasn’t, “for you?”

“Probably,” she shrugged, “maybe for you too. No more worrying about your muggle girlfriend miles away, free to date anyone you liked...”

Harry merely stared at her with open-mouthed incredulity, “You’re not serious are you? You think it would be easier for me if you died so I could date other people?”

“Yeah, well when you say it like that it sounds ridiculous,” she told him irritably.

“It sounds ridiculous any way you say it Kitty!” he told her with a laugh “If you’re so worried about us meeting someone else maybe we should just break up now.”

“Do you think we should?” she asked him.

“No!” he exclaimed in disbelief, “I was being sarcastic! Why, do you want to break up? Do you think it’d be easier? That we’d suddenly feel different?”

“Of course not,” she said, “I just can’t stand the thought of being alone for months and never seeing you...”

Harry stared at her, finally understanding what she was meant. In some ways it'd be easier for him, at least he'd have Ron and Hermione. But she'd be alone. They wouldn't see each other for months. Suddenly what everyone was demanding of them seemed impossible.

"I know," he said glumly, "it's all gone wrong..."

"Maybe we're cursed," she replied and he couldn't help but agree.

They stared down the flights of moving stairs, surrounded by moving paintings and ghosts and Harry wished he had a time turner.

"For God's sake!" she exclaimed suddenly in a frustrated voice, "I'm so sick of having to think about all this stuff! I wish we could just have a magic-free night! Where we don't have to think about everybody here and we can just be together and normal, like before!"

Harry nodded in agreement, he wished they were back in Donna's flat, enjoying a night in front of the television. No worries, no baggage. And then suddenly, he thought of the answer, it was so simple he almost laughed that he hadn't thought about it earlier.

"Your wish is my command," he told her, standing up straight and offering her his hand.

"What?" she asked in surprise, "What does that mean?"

"Think you can cope with one last bit of magic?" he said, still holding out his hand expectantly.

"What kind of magic? Why?" Kitty said, taking his hand warily.

"Follow me and see," he said with a mischievous grin.

She grilled him all the way along the corridor until they reached the painting of the dancing trolls. He let go of her hand and began to pace in front of a blank stretch of the wall.

I want somewhere Kitty will feel at home...I want somewhere Kitty will feel at home...I want somewhere Kitty will feel at home...

“What are you doing Ha-” Kitty began before trailing off as a door appeared in front of her as if by...well...magic.

Harry grinned at her shocked expression.

“Magic’s over for tonight, ok?” he promised, taking hold of the door handle and opening it up for her.

“What is it?” she whispered, peering around the edge of the doorframe, “Je-sus Christ!”

Kitty walked into the room, staring about her in open mouth shock. Harry walked in a closed the door, which instantly morphed back into the wall and he looked around him. The Room of Requirement had become the lounge similar to those of the various flats had inhabited over the past few weeks. There was a large, comfy looking sofa positioned in front of a large, muggle television, the table in front of which was brimming with various muggle snackfood’s and bottles of drink.

“How...” she began, looking through the CD collection near the hi-fi system.

“It’s called the Room of Requirement,” he explained, looking over her shoulder, “it’s a magic room, you can ask it to be anything you want and it’ll become that thing, only for you. When I was pacing in front of the wall, I was asking it to be somewhere you’d feel safe.”

She scanned the room again, wide smile breaking out onto her face as she began to laugh incredulously.

“It’s perfect Harry!” she said ecstatically, bounding over to him and wrapping her arms around him.

“Fancy having a night in?” he asked her, also smiling now, “Watch a few movies?”

“Yes! More than anything!” she grinned, leaning forwards and kissing him happily.

It was the first time they’d properly been together and alone since before Kitty was introduced into the world of magic and they didn’t break apart for sometime. It felt good not to worry about everyone else around them and to recapture the privacy they once had.

“I’ve missed you Harry,” she murmured into his lips sometime later.

“Missed me or missed kissing me?” he replied cheekily.

She pretended to give this some thought before giving him a grin, “Not just the kissing I guess.”

He laughed, before kissing her again, threading his fingers through her tangled braids in a motion that he felt like he’d done a thousand times before, it was comforting in its familiarity. When they broke away, Kitty merely laughed to herself, straightening her hair up and catching her breath.

“Right, well Mr Potter, I’m going to put on a movie,” she told him, straightening up his shirt for no reason, “you sit down before you’re stitches split everywhere.”

Harry dropped into the sofa and after a moments thought took a look at the scar on his stomach. The long, red wound left there was healing slowly but contained no stitches, he hadn’t thought the Matron would have used them but didn’t point this out to Kitty. She spent some time choosing the movie and he didn’t even bother trying to work out how muggle technology was functioning within Hogwarts or how the room knew her favourite movies.

As it began playing she walked back over to the sofa and instead of sitting next to him, climbed onto his lap, straddling him as she gave him the first happy smile he’d seen for sometime.



“Feel better?” he asked innocently, wrapping his arms around her waist and pulling her closer.

“Much,” she said smugly, “feel like I should be saying some corny line like ‘welcome to my world’ or something.”

Harry merely laughed before she leant down towards him and began kissing him slowly.

And for a few hours at least they were like any other young couple in love, having nothing more to worry about than what time they could stay out till.

AN/ I kind of see this chapter as the ‘explainer’ one you get in every book, which ties up lots of loose ends. Sort of like the ‘Horcruxes’ chapter in HBP. Hope it helped!

I was absolutely amazed at the number of reviews from the last chapter and by the fact that bar one or two (rather abusive) individuals, you were all horrified that I was about to kill off Kitty! Thank you so much for all you out there who wait patiently for updates, reading instead of revising/working and investing the story!

I also wanted to take the opportunity to explain why it always takes me so long to get updates out – I could spout the usual excuses like work etc but the truth is I’m a perfectionist and have to read through the thing a million times before I unleash it on the web! I’m also thinking of writing a sequel, which means I have to go back and read box 1-6 again hehehe...

## Chapter Twenty Nine

Cursed, since your birth dear,  
And your worst fears have all come true,  
Babe you're not the first here on earth dear,  
'Cause I'm still here,  
And I'm cursed too, cursed like you.

Tonks sat herself down on the small chair that was stationed next to Remus' Hospital Wing bed, taking in his sleeping form anxiously. His usual post-lunar appearance seemed to be heightened by the massive risks he'd taken to help her and he still had deep shadows ringing both eyes and a certain amount of stubble shadowing his usually smooth skin. She practically forced herself not to run her fingers down his cheek, well aware that Mrs Weasley was only a few beds down from her, deep in conversation with Professor McGonagall.

It was taking every ounce of will power not to lean down and kiss him or jump up on her stool and scream to everyone that she loved him and they were together. But they had both been holding back from saying anything to every one so far; it wasn't even as if they'd discussed it and agreed, they just both instinctively knew that this was private, for the time being. No doubt they were raising suspicion and she was sure she'd seen Dumbledore wink at her the day before.

Nearly half an hour after she'd first sat down she could see Remus stirring and she leant closer to him, studying him carefully. He scrunched his eyes against the light and groaned to himself, before dragging his eyes open and catching sight of her.

"Wotcher sleeping beauty," she said softly.

He gave a lopsided smile at her, rubbing his face in attempt to wake himself up further.

"How you feeling?"

"Much better," he said, yawning widely, "how about you, stopped bouncing about the room yet?"

She gave a grin of embarrassment; she'd quite literally been dancing with happiness when she'd run into the Hospital Wing and told Remus about Harry's gift.

"Not quite," she replied, "I went down to Gringotts this morning! It was only the thought of the security guards manhandling me out of the building again that stopped me from taking my gold and shoving it right up those smarmy Goblin's green-"

"I get the picture," Remus cut in dryly, "so where do you stand now, is everything paid off?"

"I have managed in one deposit to not only pay off my debts, loans and fees, but I've also managed to set up a high interest account for not only my parents but well..."

"Well what?" asked Remus suspiciously.

"Well...us," she said in a small voice, looking acutely embarrassed.

"What!"

"Ssh!" she hushed, flapping her arms at him as McGonagall and Mrs Weasley all turned to look at them curiously.

"What?" he merely repeated in a demanding whisper.

"I've put some money aside for us," she said, shifting uncomfortably, before rushing on, "and before you say anything! I know that we've only just...well, we're just staring out and a joint account is something reserved for couples shopping for china patterns together. I just thought...Harry was way too generous and I don't want all his or Sirius' money, I want you to have some too. It's only fair..."

"Tonks," he said in a strangled voice, "you can't just give me your money like that!"

“I said the same thing to Harry but he wouldn’t hear anything about it, so I’ve learned from the master. Come on, this is Sirius we’re talking about, he’d have wanted you to have some.”

“But-”

“Remus please!” she said desperately, completely disobeying her own orders and taking up his hand, “it’s not your gold just as much as it’s not mine! You’ve just put yourself through absolute hell to help me, now I’m doing something for you.”

“I didn’t do this so you’d have to pay me back,” he mumbled, looking down at his sorry state.

“I know,” she said emphatically, giving his hand a squeeze, “and I’m not doing this to pay you back - I’d want to give you the gold even if you’d never done anything. I...I just want you to be happy.”

“I am happy,” he said, looking up into her eyes, “now.”

Tonks smiled at him, unable to quite believe her luck. This time last month she was drowning in a sea of debt and depression. Remus had been the only thing keeping her afloat and now...

“This is unreal,” she murmured half to herself, half to him.

“What is?” he asked her softly.

“Everything,” she said, feeling suddenly as if she were so happy she would never stop grinning, “the money...everything! I can’t believe you want to be with me...”

“I’d be stupid not to,” he said with a laugh, “you’re gorgeous!”

She gave a surprised laugh, “That was not very Remus-like at all! Have you been practicing those lighten-up exercises I started you on?”

“Just stating a fact,” he said with another laugh, “anyway, how do you know what the inner-Remus is like? I might think about things like that all the time.”

Again Tonks could only laugh at his behaviour, giving him a dirty grin, “Maybe we should introduce him to the inner-Tonks?”

“And what’s she like, shy and reserved?”

“Hell no!” she said flippantly, “You should hear what she says about you!”

“Now I’m curious,” he said, giving her a lopsided grin, “What does she say?”

“It’s more what she thinks I guess,” said Tonks mischievously, “for example, right then she was thinking about how if Molly and the others weren’t in this room right now she’d climb up on top of you and-”

“On second thoughts maybe this should wait till later,” said Remus quickly, faint blush on his cheeks.

“Later eh?” she asked, enjoying making him squirm.

“Yes actually,” he said, rallying against her purposeful attempts to make him blush, “I’m leaving this place today no matter what the prognosis is and I vote we go out somewhere.”

“Just the two of us?” she challenged.

“Definitely just the two of us,” he stated, “though you may bring inner-Tonks along if you want.”

“How about we double date?” she suggested impishly, “You ask inner-Remus along, I wanted to find out more about this intriguing aspect to your psyche.”

“Ok then,” he replied evenly.

“Looking forward to it,” grinned Tonks happily, “and what’s more, we’ve got the money and the time to go wherever we want now, and I’m sure Sirius would approve of spending it on blatantly ridiculous things such as ice cream and Firewhiskey!”

“You just described my perfect date,” he said, to which she merely poked her tongue out.

“Shame both of us are homeless,” Tonks said, crinkling her nose against the obvious flaw in their exciting plan, “it’s not going to be very romantic back in Grimmauld Place with every one around, inner-Tonks doesn’t approve.”

“ Well Miss Moneybags,” Remus merely said, expression not flickering at their discussion, “now you’re rich you can get your apartment back.”

“Oh yeah!” she replied, looking slightly dumbfounded that she hadn’t realised this already, “Course I can! I can even get a new flat, one that doesn’t smell of rotting kippers every third Saturday of the month.”

“Did your old one?” he asked, sidetracked.

“Yeah, never found out why,” she said with a shrug, “I think it had something to do with the guy next door to me, very suspicious smells coming from that flat. Probably an illegal potion brewer.”

“Nevertheless,” he said, sitting up in bed now and giving her a bright smile, “you’ve got the money to get a new place now.”

“Fancy going flat hunting?” she joked, “We could check out some china patterns too.”

“Not just yet,” he said easily, making her pause for a second in surprise - was he thinking about the future?

She had to stop herself thinking about her and Remus sharing a flat together, trying desperately not to imagine what it would be like to wake up with him lying next to her every morning. However, a dreamy smile must have crept across her face because Remus gave a slight laugh.

“I haven’t seen you looking this happy for months,” he said.

“Haven’t had a reason to be happy for months,” she countered, grinning at him with what she guessed must be a blatantly love struck expression, “I wish everybody in the world was as happy as I am today!”

He nodded in agreement and Tonks felt her eyes being drawn over his shoulders to the bed a couple down from theirs. Harry was sat on one end, cross-legged, facing Kitty, who was sitting similarly so. They were talking in low, serious voices and Tonks suddenly the smile slipping off her face, forget the whole world, she wished everyone in this room were as happy as she was.

Remus must have noticed her expression because he turned and looked over his shoulder, face also falling slightly.

“This is such a difficult situation,” he mused and Tonks nodded in agreement, “there’s no way out of it, is there?”

“No,” she sighed heavily, “either way you look at it they can’t be together as they’d want, not just for now anyway.”

“Let’s just hope they can make it till the end of Hogwarts together,” Remus said.

“Yeah, I think-” began Tonks, before she froze mid sentence.

Remus stared at her expectantly. She sat stock still, brows knitted together, obviously deep in thought.

“Merlin’s teeth,” she exclaimed in a low voice.

She trailed off, staring into the distance.

“What?” he prompted, when it seemed clear she was not going to elaborate any further.

“I just thought...”

Again he waited, staring in confusion as she turned things over in his mind.

“What if...” she began, before looking up to him questioningly, “that would work, wouldn’t it?”

“What would?” he asked in exasperation.

“I have to go and see Dumbledore!” she exclaimed, jumping to his feet, “Can you come?”

“Do I get to hear the end of your sentences if I do?” he asked, already swinging his legs stiffly out of the bed.

“Yes! Come on!” she said, taking his arm and all but pulling him towards the door, “I am such a genius!”

“If you say so,” Remus supplied, sure that his input was not necessary for the conversation anymore.

“It’s just a little bruised.”

“Are you sure? It’s killing me!”

Harry frowned, pushing the multicoloured braids that passed for Kitty’s hair aside as he examined the side of her head more closely.

“Honest, it’s just a bruise.”

“How big is it?” she demanded.



“Bullet sized?” he told her flatly.

She batted his hand away irritably and moved away and he sighed to himself. He knew why she was in a bad mood, it couldn't be more obvious really, but he still found her mood difficult to deflect. It was hard enough trying to cheer her up when he had nothing to offer, without her being unreceptive to his attempts.

“You've got all the tact of a sledgehammer sometimes Harry,” she commented, leaning back against the pillows of her hospital bed and folding her arms.

“I'm trying ok? Not many guys have to deal with their girlfriend trying to kill themselves.”

Almost as soon as the words had left his lips he regretted them and the expression on Kitty's face made him feel instantly ashamed.

“Oh I'm sorry Harry! It is a bit much to try and deal with, isn't it?” she demanded sarcastically, looking hurt.

“ You know I didn't mean it,” he apologised at once, “I'm just...worried...”

She stared at him incredulously, before shifting her attention behind him. Harry turned and looked over his shoulder to see Tonks hurrying out of the room, practically dragging Remus behind her. He was reminded about what Ron said about them being good friends and looked after them thoughtfully for a moment.

“ Listen, I'm sorry,” Harry repeated, turning back to her, “let's not...let's not fight when we've got so little time left?”

“Fine” she sighed in a way that told him she was going to be just as unresponsive as she was before, “just bear in mind I've got a killer headache.”

“Let’s go for a walk?” he suggested, sliding off her bed, “I haven’t shown you the tower yet, have I?”

Twenty minutes later and they were walking along the forth floor corridor having spent the last five minutes of which in silence. Kitty couldn’t really think of much to talk about, her head was still throbbing painfully and Harry had been deep in thought. She always knew no good would come of this, she’d seen enough of Harry’s pensive moods to realise that no good ever came of them.

“Come on then,” she prompted finally, sick of the expectant air surrounding their walk.

“What?”

“Tell me what’s on your mind,” Kitty elaborated, “I can practically hear the cogs clunking round from here.”

Harry stopped walking and turned to her, slightly anxious look on his face.

“I’ve been thinking,” he said carefully, studying his hands, “You could stay in Sirius’ house.”

She didn’t say anything for a moment, but frowned at him as their voices echoed around the stone walls.

“Sirius’s house?” she asked in a flat voice finally.

“Yeah, he left it to me you know,” he replied, “you could stay there? I mean, it’s really safe and all the Order members visit it almost every day. Professor Lupin is living there now I think.”

Kitty nodded slowly, watching her feet for some time. She wasn’t sure why, but putting things into words and making definite plans suddenly brought home the reality of her imminent departure.

“I guess that’s a good idea,” she said, struggling to put into words her reluctance, “what’s it like?”

Harry hesitated slightly and she took this as a bad sign.

“Grim,” he admitted truthfully, “Sirius nearly went stir-crazy living there...but it’s the only safe place I can think of...Voldemort is still out there.”

Kitty frowned even deeper, she still had difficulty believing Harry when he told her she hadn’t really killed Tom Riddle that night. Nobody could survive six bullets to the chest she told herself, nobody human at least.

“Kitty?” prompted Harry anxiously.

“Do you think I should?” she merely asked.

“It’s safe...” he began helplessly, “I just want you to be safe.”

“I know,” she replied dully, “I suppose it’s the best we’ve got.”

Kitty had never wished as fervently as she did in that moment that Tom Riddle had never found them that day in Wolverhampton, that the Graveyard had never happened, the church, the car-crash, everything. Tom Riddle had ruined their life.

“Dumbledore might think of something,” he suggested in a voice that said he read her thoughts perfectly, “and if not...there’s always Christmas...”

They both instinctively looked at the glorious sunshine streaming in through the windows of the corridor, basking their surroundings in a late summer glow. Winter could not seem further away.

“I’ve been thinking Harry,” she said, staring at one stained glass window as if mesmerised by the sunshine, “Pops, er, Dumbledore said something to me I’ve been thinking about...”

“What’s that?” he asked, turning slightly to look at her.

“He told me to look at this as an opportunity,” she replied, “he said I should look upon this as a fresh start - that I have a chance now to begin again and be who I want to be.”

Harry gave a flicker of a smile, “That sounds like Dumbledore. What do you think about that?”

“I-” she began, wondering how she could put into words what she was feeling right then, whether Harry would understand what she truly meant.

“I think it sounds fantastic,” she breathed finally, turning to look at him with imploring eyes, “Harry, you know my history, you know all the terrible things I’ve seen and done...I always felt like it wasn’t my fault, because of my mom, because of my upbringing or whatever, always blaming everyone else...I always wanted to run away and be somebody else and-”

“- and now you can,” Harry finished, watching her intently.

She breathed a shaky sigh of relief that he had understood, reaching across and picking up his hand and intertwining her fingers with his.

“Can you imagine it Harry...” she asked in a faraway voice, “I could be anyone I wanted to be, start again, do it all right this time. My second chance.”

“I think it sounds like exactly what you need,” he said, smiling sadly now, “who do you want to be?”

She cast him a sideways look, also smiling.

“I want to be someone you’d be proud of.”

“I already am proud of you,” he told her at once.

“I want you to be really proud of me,” she insisted.

“I already am,” he repeated wearily, stopping in his tracks and pulling her closer towards him, “Listen Kitty, you saved my life, you never gave up on me, you fought off Death Eaters and the most evil wizard in the world. Do you realise how many people have done that? How many people haven’t? I could never be more proud of you than I am right now.”

She gave a shy smile and he leaned towards her, planting a light, loving kiss on her lips. She closed her eyes dreamily and kissed him back, both of them strangely content to keep it chaste and almost innocent. When he drew back Kitty gave a ghost of a smile, leaning her forehead against his.

“Seeing as you’re so easy to please Potter,” she said quietly, “let’s just say I want to be somebody I’m proud of.”

Harry closed his own eyes, content for them to stand like this forever, her lips almost grazing his.

“And I’m going to do it all right, Harry,” she promised him in a low voice, “I won’t make the same mistakes a second time around.”

“You could make them a million times over and I wouldn’t care,” he replied and she could feel the vibration of his voice through her own body as they leant together, “I’d still want you just as badly.”

She gave a soft laugh, closing the imperceptible gap between them and kiss him once more, heart hammering madly in her chest, she couldn’t remember the last time she’d felt so...alive.

As if sensing her thoughts she felt Harry deepen the kiss suddenly and she gratefully allowed him to press her back against the wall as she pulled him closer. She could feel all the blood rushing to her head as they kissed, her legs becoming shaky and unsteady. When she finally broke away she realised she was trembling, almost frightened that if she didn’t stop soon, she never would, there was something lingering in the kiss that ran deeper than desire. Harry regarded her with strangely glittering eyes, obviously just as lost in the moment as she was.

“Ok?” he asked in a low voice.

Not knowing what he meant, she merely gave him a shaky grin. Harry returned it and stepped backwards and took up her hand, inviting her to walk on with him. She followed silently for a few moments, trying to clear her head from the pervading fog which suddenly seemed to take hold, nothing to do with her previous headache.

“You’ve gone all quiet,” Harry laughed in a half-serious voice, “are you thinking about Sirius’ house?”

She grinned slightly to herself, “Actually, I was just wondering if you were always such a good kisser or whether a near death experience gave a helping hand.”

Harry laughed, “Nice to know you taking this seriously.”

“I am, don’t you worry,” she said, stopping again and facing him, “I think I’m ready to take responsibility for myself now. I’m going to make my own decisions and I’m not going to carry on as if I’m indestructible and nothing matters. I’m going to make sure every second counts.”

Harry nodded wordlessly.

“So I’ll move into Sirius’ house if you want me to,” she promised him, “I will sort my life out. And I’ll count down the days until Christmas.”  
Tonks wandered across the grounds of Hogwarts, basking in the warm sunlight that seemed to be sucking all the illness and depression she’d been carrying for weeks. She couldn’t remember the last time she felt so happy, she was finally with Remus, she had cleared off her debts, she’d never have to go back to Azkaban...She couldn’t help but feel despite the impending war, right at that moment, there was nowhere she’d rather be...

It was so rare that things should be going well and that she actually had good news for someone that she thought she might just burst

with joy right there and then all over Hagrid's well kept lawn. She felt like the situation, which had been spiralling out of control these past few months, was suddenly being managed, orchestrated, organised. Like they'd finally all sat down together and worked everything out, which she reminded herself, they just had.

She was broken from her happy reverie by the sound of laughter and she looked up to see the Weasley clan and Hermione chasing each other on brooms only metres from the floor. She laughed as she watched the twins chasing Ginny, who was perfecting her Chaser swerve and successfully managing to dodge almost everyone. Feeling her happy mood couldn't be broken she looked around for Kitty and Harry, quickly locating them.

They were sitting on the grass away from the others, looking like the picture of happiness. Kitty was leaning into Harry's chest, who had his arms wrapped around her, whispering something into her ear. She began to laugh at whatever he'd said and twisted around, placing a kiss on lips.

"Get a room!" yelled one of the twins from above and Tonks gave a snicker.

Kitty must have whispered a response to Harry because he began to laugh now. Tonks wandered over to them and sprawled out on the grass next to them.

"Hiya Tonks," smiled Kitty, snuggling back into her previous position.

"Wotcher," she replied, smiling as Harry wrapped his arms back around her, "enjoying the sun?"

"Among other things," Harry joked as Kitty elbowed him playfully.

"How you feeling Harry?" she asked even though the answer was quite obvious.

"Fine," he grinned, "better now I can be back outside."

“He wants to go flying though, don’t you?” Kitty asked, before stopping in surprise, “I can’t believe I just said that as normal...”

They all chuckled at her and spent a few minutes chatting, discussing the mini-Quidditch match taking place in front of them or skirting around topics that concerned the outside world.

“So what are you doing here today?” Kitty was asking her, “I thought you were going back to work?”

“Thought I’d use a bit of my holiday time,” Tonks merely replied, “essential work to do you know, topping up my suntan for instance. Evil psychopaths can wait until next week.”

Both her and Harry chuckled appreciatively, before whooping suddenly as Hermione performed an almost passable attempt at goal, causing Ron to shake his fists in anger from his keeper position.

“Hey, while I’m here, can I speak to you for a minute, Cathy?” asked Tonks.

“Er, sure,” she said, looking surprised before turning to Harry uncertainly.

Harry gave a laugh and disentangled himself from her, “Know where I’m not wanted.”

Kitty merely grinned and climbed to her feet and looked over to Tonks, “Well, what’s up?”

“Fancy a walk?” she suggested, already pointing the direction away from the pitch.

“And now I’m intrigued,” she laughed as they made their way over towards Hagrid’s hut perched on the edges of the forest.

“Well, I guess I ought to congratulate you first,” Tonks said, before laughing at Kitty’s puzzled expression, “if our roles were reversed I



think I'd have completely lost it by now and probably tried to murder half the occupants of the castle."

"The thought did cross my mind," Kitty said playfully, before shrugging, "but that wouldn't change anything would it?"

"Definitely not. But that probably wouldn't stop me," said Tonks, "I'm really glad you've managed to come through all this reasonably well balanced."

"Well I'll take that the best way I can!" Kitty laughed, "nice to know I'm reasonably well balanced. But I think a big part of it's down to you and Remus, for being there for me..."

"It's our pleasure," she smiled, leaning against the fence of Hagrid's pumpkin patch, "which leads me on to what I actually wanted to talk to you about. You see, I have a proposition."

"You're going to make me an offer I can't refuse?" she quipped and Tonks grinned.

"Yeah, that's about right," she agreed.

Kitty gave a curious look, "Well, what is it?"

"Well, I know we've pretty much ruled out the possibility of you staying here now," began Tonks, "and I know you must have been discussing our options with Harry."

"Yeah...we've talked about it..." she said slowly.

"And, we've conveniently been avoiding the situation the past few days after the whole gun episode," she continued.

"I had noticed," replied Kitty dryly.

"Well, I've just been in a meeting with Dumbledore and a few members of the Order," she explained, "trying to think of a solution."

“And?” demanded Kitty querulously.

“Well, what would you say if I told you we’d thought of a way for you to have somewhere to live, where you’d be able to see Harry whenever you wanted and you’d be safe?”

Kitty’s eyebrows shot up and her face lit up in hope, “I’d say you’d better tell me before I explode! Where?”

“With me,” she said simply.

“HARRY!”

The yell came from way back across the ground of Hogwarts but Harry turned to Kitty expectantly, she was running full tilt down the lawns, arms waving. His first instinct was that something was wrong and he knew that the others thought the same because the Quidditch game halted instantly. However, after a moment he could see that Kitty was grinning madly at him, a massive smile on her face as she yelled his name again, waving.

He grinned at her theatrics as Ron, Hermione and the others all landed beside him, all staring at her curiously.

“What are you yelling about?” he called back as she came within reasonable earshot.

She merely laughed deliriously, practically jumping into his arms, making him stumble backwards as he caught her.

“What?” he demanded as she laughed, steadying herself as she breathed deeply.

“I can live with Tonks!” she exclaimed in a rush, cheeks flushed with exertion, “she’s getting a flat and she wants me to move in with her!”

“What?” he repeated incredulously.

“She wants me to live with her! She’s asked Pops and everything and he thinks it’s a brilliant idea!”

“But that’s...that’s perfect...” Harry said blankly, completely taken aback.

“I know!” she laughed deliriously, leaning forward and kissing him happily.

“That’s amazing,” Ron said, watching him and Kitty, before turning to the others, “isn’t it?”

Harry broke away from Kitty and looked around them all nodding, before back at Kitty, who looked like all her dreams had come true at once. He couldn’t have thought of a better person for Kitty to live with, not only was she friends with her but she was also a qualified Auror and could protect her.

“I wouldn’t get too excited Cathy,” came a voice from behind them all, “I’m a right old slob.”

“Are you kidding!” she practically yelped, breaking away from him and practically bowling Tonks over with a similar bear hug, “I wouldn’t care if you had dead bodies under the floorboards!”

Harry laughed appreciatively as she and Tonks began to perform an impromptu victory dance, which the Twins soon joined for fear of being upstaged. Harry merely turned to Hermione, trying to roll his eyes at their charades but unable to keep the goofy smile off his face, she merely grinned back at him in a most un-Hermione like way.

When the others had finally calmed down to the point where they were only occasionally whooping and laughing Harry decided to reclaim his girlfriend and grabbed Kitty’s hand, pulling her towards him once more.

“Much better than Sirius’ place,” he said happily.

“Definitely!” she giggled, “Harry, I get to live with Tonks! In a magical house! Can you believe this? She says they’re going to come up with ways for us to keep in touch!”

“Brilliant,” he breathed, her exuberance seemed intoxicating, he couldn’t remember the last time he’d felt so carefree.

“And it’s all because your boyfriends loaded!” Tonks quipped, dragging Harry out of Kitty’s grasp and pulling him into a waltz, “and because Harry is the most generous wizard in the world ever!”

“Tonks!” Harry exclaimed in embarrassment, trying to wriggle out of her grasp as everyone laughed at his appalling attempt at dancing.

It was the Yule Ball all over again, being steered around like a wooden dummy by a vastly superior dancer.

“Ah, come on Harry, revel in being happy, healthy and free!” she crowed, spinning him around as Kitty laughed appreciatively.

“I can revel sitting down!” he told her when she still refused him release.

“Hey, I don’t dance for all the guys you know,” she laughed, “I’ll let you go if you show me your moves.”

“Yeah, come on Harry, show us your moves!” Fred suggested, waltzing past him in the opposite direction, hand wrapped amorously around George’s waist.

Harry laughed, before deciding to wipe the smiles off their faces and resolutely taking the lead off Tonks. He spun her around a few times, to which she whooped in satisfaction.

“See, that wasn’t so terrible was it?” she demanded, allowing him to twirl her around once more before letting go and giving him a curtsy.

Harry bowed melodramatically to which Ron sniggered appreciatively.

“Don’t know what you’re laughing at Weasley,” she suggested, already trotting over to him and dragging him forward by the hand, “you’re next.”

Harry watched Ron’s ears change from normal to red in record speed time and he was forced to pirouette on the spot, Hermione and Ginny giving each other a helpless shrug before launching into their own dance hooking arms and swinging each other around. He turned to Kitty who was watching everyone with a grin that seemed a mixture of 90 per cent disbelief and 10 per cent delirium.

“May I have this dance,” he asked her, holding out his hand.

After pretending to give it a long moments thought, she took his hand and allowed him to pull her closer, settling on a slow dance as the others launched themselves backwards and forwards around them. He rested his forehead on hers in a familiar pose he thought they’d done a million times before, both closing their eyes.

“Your friends are mad,” she murmured to him impishly, “you all are.”

“You’re probably right,” he admitted.

“We also have good hearing,” quipped a Twin from behind them.

“And take offence easily,” added the other.

Kitty gave a snigger and shot him a look that said ‘I told you so’.

“Happy?” he asked, concentrating on the way he could feel her heart beating furiously against his on chest.

“You bet,” she told him, before giving a disbelieving laugh, “I can’t believe this is happening to me...”

“What, the dancing?” he joked.

“Yeah, of course!” she teased, before sighing happily, “No, this...this is the best thing that could have happened.”

“I know,” he replied as they slowly rotated on the spot, “and she said they’re thinking of ways for us to see each other?”

“Yeah,” she said, splitting into a wide grin once more, “perfect.”

He smiled, leaning forwards and planting a soft kiss on her lips - suddenly Christmas was looking a lot closer and the future looked a lot brighter. He guessed they technically weren’t dancing anymore and moved his hands to her waist, pulling her closer.

“Get a room!” yelled George, who stalked past them, doing a fierce rumba with Fred.

Kitty merely giggled and Harry gave a deep, fake sigh.

“No rest for the wicked,” Kitty told him as they watched everyone else come to their senses and abandon their dancing.

Ron looked relieved, shuffling as far from Tonks’ reach as possible the moment she surrendered him.

“So, Cathy, I take it that was you accepting?” she asked innocently as she walked towards them, still smirking at Ron’s embarrassment.

“Well, I’ll have to think about it,” she said, rubbing her chin for a moment, “of course!”

“In that case we’ve got some planning to do,” she said, walking over and taking her arm, “why don’t we go and visit Dumbledore and figure everything out.”

“Sure thing!” she agreed happily, reaching out to take his hand.

Harry accepted it and the three of them made their way towards the castle, waving goodbye to the others who soon resumed their Quidditch match. He still couldn’t quite believe that they’d managed to

find a plausible solution to their situation, and what's more, it was one that benefited everyone. He'd be able to see her and Kitty would have a home and protection. It wasn't perfect, but it sure as hell beat any other plan they'd come up with so far.

He walked the way with them in silence, listening to Kitty quiz Tonks incessantly about anything and everything. Far from minding, Tonks seemed almost as excited as Kitty and Harry wondered for a moment how they had become such good friends.

Dumbledore was stood at the window of his office, gazing down across the vast lawns of Hogwarts, small, thoughtful smile on his lips. He had watched the Tonks' plan develop with a sense of almost wonder at the way the universe righted things, believing it was a testament to the adage that if you wanted something hard enough, you'd always find a way.

He felt sure that Sirius would approve how his inheritance had changed hands so rapidly and helped so many people - Tonks, her family, Kitty Remus...He felt certain Sirius would have gained a savage pleasure that the Black family money was being spent supporting blood traitors, muggles and half-breeds. As he was musing these thoughts over, he watched Tonks breaking the news to Kitty, smiling to himself once more as she practically gambolled the lawn towards Harry.

He turned away from the window and seated himself at his desk, deep in thought as he studied the black-stoned ring on his finger. Just as certain as he was of Sirius' reaction, he knew how Voldemort would react to this latest obstacle. In particular, he could imagine the Dark Lords fury at knowing he was so badly wounded by a muggle, and by muggle means no less.

He felt that either Harry and Kitty weren't aware of this, or they were trying not to think about it. He felt a deep sense of dread in his soul as he looked towards the future and what must be done, and how much more difficult it would be with Kitty in the equation. However, he was just as certain of how much easier it would be for Harry now and he would have had it no other way, despite what Kingsley and Moody might have thought.

A cheerful knock at the door broke into his ruminations.

“Come in,” he called out, unsurprised to see not only Tonks, but Kitty shortly followed by Harry walking into his office.

“I hope you’re all well after your exertions?” he said as they sat at the chairs he summoned.

After a moments puzzlement he nodded to the window to indicate he had witnessed their impromptu dance on the lawns. Harry and Kitty gave embarrassed laughs and Tonks merely grinned widely.

“I think we can safely say Cathy’s quite pleased with our plan?” she guessed with a sidelong look at Kitty, who nodded her head emphatically.

“Tonks is a genius,” she stated happily.

“I know I know,” Tonks said airily, before turning to Dumbledore, “I just thought we ought to sort everything out now, so we can rest happy?”

“Indeed,” Dumbledore said, leaning forwards and surveying the pair for a moment, thoughts still back with his reflections on Voldemort’s next plan of action.

“As I have already said to Tonks, I think this is the best solution to our predicament. However, my paramount concern is now that nobody knows about Miss Earl’s whereabouts or connection to you Harry,” Dumbledore said, giving him a slight nod of acknowledgment, “I’ve no doubt that Voldemort will continue to search for her and we cannot allow careless talk.”

Harry nodded silently, and Dumbledore knew that he was vocalising what he feared most, Voldemort’s desire to find Kitty, and he wondered if Harry had fully realised what a huge sacrifice Kitty was making for him, and the danger she faced. Harry turned to look at her



worriedly, but she was merely nodding along as if she'd long known about this.

"What do you propose?" asked Tonks, expression serious.

"Several things spring to mind immediately," he said, leaning back in his chair, "firstly, only those that need to know of her existence should be kept in the loop, as it were. I suggest modifying any memories of non-essential connections."

"Does this include Order members?" asked Tonks, and Dumbledore could see Harry already beginning to think who knew about Kitty.

"Some Order members yes," he replied, "I shall draw up a list of those I believe need to know of the situation, which you may of course check over."

Here he nodded to Kitty, who merely shrugged - she either didn't know or care about who was in the Order.

"Secondly, Harry I must ask you and your friends not to speak to any of your fellow classmates about Miss Earl or give any indication of her existence. I'm sure you are aware of how quickly news, and in particular gossip, travels through Hogwarts."

He nodded mutely and Dumbledore guessed he didn't feel a great desire to have the whole school talking about him any more than they usually did and would most probably have observed this precaution without being told.

"Needless to say you will be facing a certain amount of interest already," Dumbledore told him, "if we are to go on recent Daily Prophet reports."

"Reports?" he asked in confusion, "Do they know I ran away?"

"No, but I gather you have been a feature of many articles over the holidays."

“About the duel at the Ministry?” he guessed with a sinking heart.

“Actually, it’s about your status as ‘The Chosen One’,” Dumbledore supplied, “I believe the papers have been full of it ever since the Ministry - I take it the new Minister for Magic has been trying to gain a private interview with you since his appointment to discuss just such a matter.”

“The Chosen One?” Harry asked incredulously.

“At least it’s a little more grown up,” quipped Tonks with a grin, “beats the Boy-Who-Lived, doesn’t it?”

Harry merely frowned and looked over at Kitty, who made a similar face of distaste.

“The media and indeed the Ministry will have you under close scrutiny this year Harry,” Dumbledore predicted, “it would be only too easy for them to discover Miss Earl and we must avoid this at all costs.”

“How?” asked Kitty, speaking up for the first time.

She looked worried.

“Oh, there are a number of ways which we can hide you. Firstly, living with Nymphadora will grant you a certain amount of protection, Auror homes have a great many security and concealment spells on them to begin with, for obvious reasons.”

“And I can think of a few extra ones we could add,” Tonks supplied helpfully.

“So, am I just going to have to stay in the house?” Kitty asked with a frown.

“Of course not, we can put a number of protection charms on you,” Dumbledore told her kindly, “but I think a little change of character

shall we say, may also be in order. It won't do for you to be recognised in the street, or discovered in the records."

"So I get to wear a wig?" she joked and Harry shot her a slight grin, her hair certainly made her easy to recognise at the moment.

"I think we could come up with something better than that," Dumbledore smiled, "but suffice to say, this is all part of the deal - a new life for a new you."

"Alright," she shrugged and Harry regarded her worriedly.

Dumbledore regarded her for a moment, she was being very blasé about them planning her life and he wondered if she was as happy as she first appeared to be. He recalled what she had said about having no family - her mother being dead and no word on a father.

"Also, I don't want to raise any suspicions by having you already at Hogwarts when the other students arrive. I believe that now Madam Pomfrey has given you the all clear Harry, we should relocate to the Order headquarters," Dumbledore informed them, "this will give us a chance to find your accommodation Kitty and for you Harry to put in an appearance in Diagon Alley - I'm sure the Daily Prophet is itching to get a shot of 'The Chosen One'."

Harry grimaced once more.

"Do we have to go back to Grimauld Place Sir?" Harry asked hesitantly, avoiding his eyes, "Couldn't we go to the Burrow?"

"I think it would be best for you both to stay within the protection of the Order," Dumbledore told them both, instantly understanding why Harry wouldn't want to go back to Grimauld Place.

"So...we stay there for a bit?" Kitty asked him hesitantly, "And then Harry comes back here and me and Tonks move, wherever is it we move to, and I do what? Just hide?"

Dumbledore fixed her with a penetrating look, employing just a little legillimens to try and read her feelings. After a moment he understood what she wanted him to ask her.

“I see no reason that you cannot lead a reasonably normal muggle life if certain safety precautions are followed,” he told her gently, “Part of the beauty of this plan is that you will be able to combine the best of both worlds, and be safe.”

“A reasonably normal muggle life?” Kitty repeated with an arched eyebrow and Dumbledore knew she was fishing for him to ask the question they both knew she wanted him to ask, “What does that mean?”

“Well,” he said expansively, spreading his hands for a moment in an all-encompassing gesture, “before all this began, what would you have been doing now?”

Kitty looked away, faint pink tinge colouring her pale cheeks as she shot Harry he looked. He made a slight gesture back to her that Dumbledore found difficult to interpret.

“I dunno,” she mumbled, “working?”

“And what would you like to do?” Dumbledore pressed.

She shrugged wordlessly.

“Can you not think of anything you would like to do?”

Again she was silent and Dumbledore decided to take the initiative.

“May I make a suggestion?” he began, waiting for her to nod before continuing, “I may of course be grossly biased in such an area, but I believe a good education is one of the most invaluable tools for a person.”

Tonks shot Kitty an encouraging smile, who merely gave a slight grin.

“I’m not what you’d call the most academic of people,” she joked, shooting Harry an amused look.

“Education isn’t academia,” Dumbledore stated, “if you do not excel in one area, you excel in another.”

“I don’t know about that, I was pretty rubbish right across the board,” she laughed.

Dumbledore didn’t share her joke, but merely reached into his drawer and pulled out a sheath of paper. Wordlessly he laid out the pieces one by one. They were the drawings she made of the Death Eaters from the Graveyard, the ones that were now in the possession of the Ministry and had helped captured several Death Eaters already.

“You are a very creative person Kitty, very artistically talented,” he said, surprised to see her blushing at the compliment, “and that is something that cannot be learned from books if you spent a lifetime studying.”

“They’re not that good,” she brushed off and Dumbledore caught Harry rolling his eyes at her theatrics.

“No, they’re better,” he stated, “now, if I asked you now what you’d like to do now, what would your answer be?”

“Busk?” she joked.

“Oh come on Kitty,” Harry cut in, “I’ve been telling you for ages that you should go to art college! And see, I’m not the only ones that think so!”

“Art college?” she laughed incredulously, “Me?”

“Of course,” Tonks replied, “you’re more than good enough to do it!”

“Even if I was,” she began laughingly, “which I’m not, I’ve failed all my GCSE’s, no art college is gonna accept me.”

“If this is what you want to do, then leave the details up to us,” Dumbledore told her, “Is this what you want to do?”

She looked to Harry incredulously who merely smiled encouragingly, before looking over to Tonks who was nodding to her emphatically. Finally she looked over to him and after a moments hesitation gave a laugh.

“Sure!” she said, throwing up her arms, “Why not? Makes as much sense as everything else that happens round here.”

With only two days left at Hogwarts before they were being moved back to Grimauld Place, Harry decided that the best way to stop both himself and Kitty dwelling on their imminent split was to keep as busy as possible. Fortunately, having the run of a magical castle offered plenty of opportunity to not only keep busy, but also have a little fun too.

Now he was feeling 100 per cent mended and Mrs Weasley was convinced he wasn't about to drop down dead, they had an almost free reign to explore. He had already discovered a new short cut through an invisible door on the fourth floor that had saved them both from being discovered by Mrs Norris who disliked their freedom of the castle.

Early one afternoon, they found themselves entering the library, which seemed almost haunted without the hundreds of students diligently being silent and trying to work. The place almost seemed without sound and nothing broke the silence save for their own footsteps and the occasional rustle of a book settling itself on the shelf. In a moments daring, he beckoned her over to one corner, stepping over the red velvet rope that guarded its entrance.

Knowing where he was, Harry felt a thrill of rebellion - no teachers note for them, Hermione would be shocked...He looked over to Kitty to see what she made of the Restricted Section and couldn't help but grin at her, leaning nonchalantly with her back against the books looking bored – if she knew what was in these books, she wouldn't be

looking so uninterested he thought to himself. He walked over to her and she gave him a smile.

“You don’t know where you are, do you?” he asked her playfully, taking both her hands and lacing his fingers into hers.

“A library?” she guessed, in a mock-thoughtful tone.

“Ha ha, very funny,” he said, before giving an excited grin, “we’re in the Restricted Section.”

“Ohhhhhh, not the Restricted Section!” she said in an overly excited voice, before dropping the act, “I feel like I should be saying not the evil castle of doom milord!”

Harry gave a genuine laugh to this, not really understanding her reference to classic Hollywood horror, but appreciating her good impression of an Igor.

“Am I supposed to be excited by a load of old books?” she asked him innocently.

“No,” said Harry playfully, “you’re supposed to be excited about being in the Restricted Section. Alone. With me.”

“Ah, it all becomes clear,” she laughed, leaning forwards slowly, “is it necessary to waggle your eyebrows every time you say restricted?”

“Yes,” said Harry seriously, “now stop being smart and start acting impressed.”

“Ok...Gosh Harry,” she gushed in a high falsetto, “looks at all these wonderful books, full of knowledge, useful diagrams and exciting experiments! I would but read every one of them if I had the time! But they are nothing compared to you, milord, who may or may not be full of knowledge, useful diagrams and exciting experiments!”

She gave a false swoon at this point as Harry cracked up, although he desperately tried not to as Kitty gathered herself back up.

“I’ve got an exciting experiment for you,” he said, grinning widely, “it’s called see-how-long-you-can-go-without-being-sarcastic/rude/unimpressed.”

She was silent for a few seconds in an attempt to play the game but was soon fidgeting slightly.

“Nope, it’s no good,” she said with a shrug, before wagging her finger at him, “and that wasn’t very exciting. How about we play my exciting experiment?”

“What is it first?” he asked suspiciously – he’d learnt never to trust Kitty when it came to things like this.

“It’s called see-how-long-i-can-kiss-you-before-we-die-of-lack-of-oxygen.”

“Sounds interesting,” he grinned, “apart from the dying bit of things.”

“We may have to stop the experiment before that point due to health and safety regulations,” she said seriously.

He pretended to give this due thought and consideration before giving up and leaning towards her. He closed his eyes just in time to see her do the same as she leaned against him, wrapping her arms around his neck as he relaxed into the kiss, forgetting where they were or why, just thinking about Kitty. He couldn’t believe how much he just missed being around her, it wasn’t the same, being in the hospital wing, always feeling like you’re being watched.

She gave a contented murmur and he couldn’t help but grin widely. Just when Harry was truly enjoying himself however, he heard the large double doors of the library swung open then shut again and he broke away from Kitty. They both heard someone walking into the library in their general direction and Harry cursed under his breath.

“Let’s just go out,” whispered Kitty after hearing him, “we’re not breaking any laws being in here.”



“Oh yes, we are,” he said quietly, moving forward towards the front shelves so he could see who it was, “restricted remember?”

“Aw, no eyebrows this time,” she said softly, obviously not realising how much trouble they could get into for breaking into the library, “I feel quite let down.”

“Ssh,” he whispered, pushing the books aside to make a space to see.

“It’s Tonks,” he said as she pushed more books aside and looked through.

“Oh that’s ok then,” said Kitty in relief, making to go out and see her, “she won’t mind.”

“Wait,” whispered Harry, holding onto her arm as the doors to the library opened again.

“Who is it this time?” asked Kitty exasperatedly.

“It’s...” began Harry, craning his neck to see, “oh it’s only Remus.”

He also made to leave the stacks now, but it was Kitty’s turn to grab his arm, “I don’t think we should do that.”

“Why not?” he asked blankly as Kitty pointed at the two with a meaningful look.

Harry turned to watch them, realising almost immediately that something was up. Remus was creeping towards her quietly and Tonks, who was deeply engrossed in the book she’d chosen, was either pretending or hadn’t heard him come in.

Harry frowned deeply, trying to figure out what was going on, as Remus came up behind Tonks and grabbed her around the waist.

She gave a yelp, twisting out of his grip quickly, before stopping when she saw who it was.

“You scared the hell out of me,” she said angrily, slapping his shoulder as he laughed.

Harry frowned even more, since when did Remus laugh like that?

“Just thought you might want some company?” he said, slipping his arms back around her waist.

Harry nearly fell over in shock as the realisation hit him – Tonks and Remus?! He looked over to Kitty, who didn’t look as shocked as she did pleased with herself.

“Have you got something to do with this?” he whispered incredulously, unable to take his eyes off this new Remus and Tonks before him.

“Not really,” she said, grinning widely as Tonks leant forward and kissed Remus briefly.

Harry couldn’t do anything but stare at Remus, who was talking and laughing in such a low voice now that he couldn’t hear their conversation.

He found himself struck, for the first time since he’d met Remus, by the fact that he had been best friends with his father, with Sirius. He had never fully understood why the quiet, reserved Remus had been part of the so-called Marauders, he seemed so out of place. But with Tonks he was suddenly transformed into this exuberant, playful person that Harry had never seen before.

“Oh, he’s so suave,” giggled Kitty, pointing to Remus who was being smacked over the head by Tonks.

Instead of feeling happy at his discovery, Harry couldn’t help but feel a twinge of sadness. Remus’s light-hearted behaviour, that was so out of place with him, would have fitted somebody else so much

better. Harry found himself so forcefully reminded of Sirius that for a moment the dream was almost tangible, Sirius was standing in front of him, laughing and joking...

He wondered to himself, whether Sirius would have ever found anyone – once he was free and the war was over. Whether he'd ever have become a father himself, whether he and Harry ever would have got that house, that home he'd been promised so long ago. But all that had been snatched away, the closest thing Harry had to a father was gone now too, and he had to start all over again.

"They look so happy though," sighed Kitty, voice seeming to come from miles away.

"What?" he asked a little vaguely as he turned to face her.

"Look at their faces," she whispered, obviously not hearing Harry's earlier tone, "they're the first truly happy people I've seen since all this began."

Harry looked at her thoughtfully for a few moments, as if trying to understand what she meant, before looking back through the shelves at the couple. He looked into Tonks' face, which was looking bright and alert, smiling widely in genuine contentment. He felt taken aback for a few moments, he'd never seen Tonks look like that before; sure she looked cheerful most of the time he saw her, always cracking jokes and trying to please everyone, but right at this moment in time she just looked...relaxed.

Feeling slightly surprised he looked over to Remus, who was now sat on top of one of the study desks, legs propped up on one of the chairs as he listened with rapt attention to what Tonks was saying. Putting all thoughts of Sirius aside, Harry studied him carefully, amazed to see for the first time since he'd known him, that Remus's face wasn't a blank slate, wasn't emotionless, or guarded. He was merely smiling, looking like there was no where in the world he'd rather be than right there, right then.

“You don’t know how strange this is to see,” said Harry finally, alternating his gaze from one to the other, “so strange...”

“Why?” asked Kitty, looking at Harry in amusement.

“Well...they’re such an unlikely couple!” he said, thinking about a werewolf and an Auror being together.

“Well, a lot of people would say that about us,” she said with a twinkle in her eye, “Look at you Mr. World famous wizard and me, barmaid and high school dropout.”

“Don’t talk about yourself like that,” he told her sharply, “that hasn’t got anything to do with who you are.”

“Well, you’ve just answered your own question there haven’t you,” she said smugly, “whose to say their unlikely, that hasn’t got anything to do with who they are.”

“Got me there,” Harry replied thoughtfully, peeking back through shelves, “I just can’t help but think...”

“What, just because there’s an age difference?” she asked him.

“Well yeah, and that,” he agreed, “she must be at least fifteen years younger than him!”

“Thirteen actually,” Kitty said, “but do you really think age has got to do with anything? Would you still like me if I was 10 years older but acted exactly the same?”

“Well yes,” scoffed Harry, as if this was obvious and she gave him a look of smug superiority.

“So what’s the problem?” she said airily, “you should be happy for your friends.”

“I am...” struggled Harry, unsure of why he was still reluctant to accept the idea, “it’s just...new for me.”

They both paused as Tonks started to laugh again, Remus shaking his head ruefully at whatever it was that had caused the humour and Harry couldn’t help but grin – they did look happy. They leant towards each other for another kiss and Harry turned away.

“Ok, so I don’t mind them being together but I don’t have to see it,” he said in mock-distaste.

“You’re just jealous,” she replied in a sing-song voice, “because he’s getting more action than you.”

“I am not! Although it is true...” he added thoughtfully, “care to rectify this?”

“Wow, what a charmer,” she said in a monotone voice, “you sweep me off my feet sometimes Harry.”

“I do try,” he retorted.

“Chuh,” she tutted sarcastically, before looking at her watch, “So, are we gonna be hiding in this stuffy library all day or shall we actually do something interesting?”

Harry studied her for a moment, idea already forming in his mind.

“Do you really want me to sweep you off your feet?” he asked finally, small grin playing on his lips.

She gave him a suspicious look.

“Why do I get the feeling that I’m going to regret answering that?” she asked flatly.

“It’s a simple question,” he shrugged mischievously, “do you want me to sweep your off your feet?”

She narrowed her eyes at him.

“Go on then,” she said challengingly, “dazzle me.”

“Follow me then.”

“You have got to be kidding me.”

Harry tried to keep a straight face but the sight of Kitty staring at him as if he were mad was too much.

“No!” he laughed, “Come on!”

“You’re not funny Potter,” she said, arms crossed as she turned a stony eye towards him.

“I’m hilarious and you know it,” he countered airily, before shuffling back on the broom and patting the handle in front of him, “Now come on.”

“Dream on,” she laughed, “there is no way I’m going up there on that thing!”

“Hey, it’s perfectly safe,” he countered, grinning at her with smug superiority.

“It’s not that I’m worried about,” she said, poking her tongue out at him, “it’s you!”

“I’ll have you know I’m a perfectly capable flyer – I’ve only fallen off about two or three times-” he began blithely and she gave an incredulous laugh.

“If you think I’m going to let a deranged madman kamikaze me on a stick filled with fairy dust you’ve got another thing coming!” she said, folding her arms firmly.

“Come on Kitty,” he said patting in front of him again.

“No!” she said resolutely.

“Why not?” he countered.

“I just told you why not!”

“Aw come on, you’re not-” he paused here for maximum effect, “scared, are you?”

She glared daggers at him, but he merely gave her a winning smile, he knew he’d already won.

“Fine,” she huffed, striding towards him, “what do I do?”

“Oh, you’re so easily influenced!” he laughed delightedly.

“Watch it Potter,” she said, giving him a sneer.

“Oh, not the last name insult,” he sniggered, “I’m really in trouble now.”

“I’m warning you!” she said pointedly, “You’re not so magic that a smack around the head won’t hurt.”

“Ok, ok, I’ll shut up now,” he promised, shuffling back again slightly, “ok – what you do is, well, sit on it basically – I’ll do all the steering.”

“Technical then?” she asked, giving a dry laugh before studying the broom carefully, “how do you turn it on?”

Harry grinned widely, “It’s already on, see?”

He lifted his legs off the ground, yet continued to hover and Kitty momentarily forgot herself and looked completely taken aback. She crouched down and looked beneath the broom, before waving her hands around the intervening space.

“I still expect wires or a trap door you know,” she said thoughtfully, “smoke and mirrors and all that crap?”

Harry smiled and she stood up, walking around the broom again.

“How does it work?” she asked.

“No idea,” he said happily, “all I know is that if you do ever finally sit on it, we can fly.”

“Alright, alright,” she tutted, “I’m just trying to make sure.”

She walked around it a few more times, asking him to repeat the hovering experiment twice and questioning him about the breaks.

“Are you happy now? Can we fly?” asked Harry desperately.

“Ok, here goes nothing,” she mumbled, almost to herself before standing next to the broom.

Harry showed her how to sit on, and as she did so it dipped slightly to take the weight and she instantly jumped back up again.

“It’s ok Kitty! Come on,” he said, beckoning her down, “it’s supposed to do that.”

She lowered herself back on slowly and after a few moments she tried the hover experiment. She gave a delighted laugh and turned and gave him a grin, to which he merely smiled encouragingly.

“Ok, you’ve got to shuffle back a bit towards me, balance it up,” he said.

“I bet you say that to all the girls,” she mocked, sliding backwards until she was leaning back against his chest.



“Oh yeah, it’s my best chat-up line,” he replied dryly and she sniggered appreciatively.

“Ooh I’m all a-flutter,” she cooed melodramatically and he merely rolled his eyes.

“Now, I’ll hold you steady,” he said, wrapping his arm around her waist tightly.

“This is your best chat-up line isn’t it?” she challenged suspiciously.

“Just thinking of your safety. And I’ll steer,” he said, leaning them both forwards so he could grasp hold of the broom.

“You know what? This is just like in those really cheesy rom-coms where the guy shows her how to play tennis or golf isn’t it?”

“You’re really good at saying the wrong thing aren’t you?” he countered, “now are we ready to fly or what?”

“Cocked, locked and ready to rock,” she laughed, “hang on though, what’s it like, will I feel sick?”

“Have you ever been on a motorbike?” he asked, placing his chin on her shoulder.

“Yeah.”

“Well think of it as a much, much faster version of that.”

And with that, he kicked off and they went rocketing for the sky, leaving behind only a slight swirl of dust and Kitty’s string of expletives.

What seemed like ten million ‘oh my Gods’ and ‘Je-sus Christ’s’ later, Kitty was still coming to terms to flying for the first time in her life. Having never been on a plane before, or been up a building with more than 20 floors, it was a very new experience for her and the

knowledge of all that was saving her from an agonisingly quick, yet spectacular death was a stick and Harry's flying skills. However, despite every bone in her body telling her this couldn't be happening, that it defied all laws of nature, she found herself slowly coming around to the broom – even, dare she say it, enjoying it?

When she stopped shouting and cursing at Harry, the broom, the air, and magic in general she finally settled back against Harry and looked out across the scene – and was amazed at how beautiful it was. The mountains ahead were highlighted by the golden sunshine which also glinted off the water of the black lake causing her at points to shield her eyes.

“What do you think?” she heard Harry ask, chin still on her shoulder.

She thought about how to reply, probably for the first time in her life.

“It's,” she began, still searching for the best way to describe it, “it's bizarre.”

He gave a small chuckle and she grinned to the sky.

“Is that good or bad then?” he asked her.

“I don't know,” she replied, before laughing in astonishment, “I don't know...”

“Forget about how weird it is for a minute,” he told her, “just look out across all this – you're flying, you know? I bet you never thought you'd ever do that.”

“That's because it only happens in dreams,” she said, taking her hands off the handle hesitantly before lurching forwards and grabbing it again in panic, “you know what?”

“What?”

“I feel like Rose in Titanic, where she’s standing at the bow of the ship and she’s looking out and she thinks she’s flying...” she gave a nervous laugh, “you know?”

“Never saw it,” he admitted and she gave a tut.

“Well, I’ll explain it to you...” and so she did, it took about half an hour as Kitty’s meticulous detail when it came to anything to do with films; directors, actors, what they’d been in before, favourite quotes and random facts about the filming. By the time she’d finished Harry already felt like he’d seen it. He had a feeling that talking was taking her mind off the fact she was 100 ft up.

“After three?” she said loudly as Harry put on a burst of speed and the wind flipped their hair about, “one...two...three-”

“ I’M KING OF THE WORLD!” they yelled in unison, before whooping loudly and collapsing into a fit of laughter.

AN/ So I know its been a huge wait again - SORRY! Legitimate reason number 53, since my last post I’ve got a new job, moved half way across the country, set up shop on my own, bought a new car and struggled with the torture of getting used to a new mobile phone.

Funny that this story has been the only consistent thing in my life for the past few years! Hope you’re still enjoying it and like seeing a bit of un-angst ridden life in the magical world! Next chapter includes Grimauld Place, Diagon Alley AND Wormwood Scrubs!

## Chapter Thirty

### On the Meaning of Sacrifice

Sometimes you wonder if this fight is worthwhile,  
The precious moments are all lost in the tide,  
They're swept away and nothing is what it seems,  
The feeling of belonging to your dreams.

The moment of truth had finally arrived, Harry and Kitty were now leaving Hogwarts, destination; Grimauld Place. It was the last place on earth Harry wanted to go right at that moment in time, memories of last year flooding back to him as he stood on the moving staircase to Dumbledore's office joined by Remus, Tonks, Snape and Kitty. Perhaps it was because of the dark mood he felt in, but even Tonks and Remus seemed muted, Harry wondered whether it was due to the way Snape was standing stiffly to one side, fists clenched. Either way, Harry resented his presence and he was pleased to catch one of Kitty's more filthy looks that were being sent in the potion masters direction.

As they reached the door it was already being pulled open by Professor McGonagall, who ushered them inside the stifling warm office. Harry looked over to the fire with a sinking feeling, not knowing whether it was because of where he was leaving or where he was going to.

"Ah, all packed and ready to go I see," Dumbledore said happily, nodding to the backpack gripped tightly in Kitty's hand.

"All ready," chimed Tonks, already pulling a pouch out of her bag.

"Now, Tonks, Severus, if you could go first you can be waiting to direct Cathy through," Dumbledore said as they gathered around the fire.

Harry noticed Kitty eyeing the flames warily, he had explained floo to her already but he hadn't really been sure if she'd believed him.

“Don’t worry,” he murmured to her, smiling encouragingly.

“I’m not worried,” she muttered back, eyes following Tonks’ every move as she drew out a handful of the glittering powder.

“Ok Cathy, what you do is throw the power into the flames, shout very clearly the address of the place you want to go to, and then step in,” Tonks told her clearly as she nodded along.

“Once you’re inside it’ll feel a bit like a rollercoaster,” Remus added, “but keep still and patient, don’t try and jump out too early or too late.”

“How will I know when to jump out?” she asked anxiously.

“It should take your straight to our grate, but because we’re not on the actual floo network you’ll be, deposited, at a safe grate for a few moments and then redirected,” Tonks told her, “the second trips going to be a lot bumpier and more uncomfortable I’m afraid. But you’ll go straight to our grate and I’ll be there to catch you just in case.”

“Is that ok Cathy?” Remus asked earnestly.

“Sure. Fine,” nodded Kitty quickly.

“I find,” said Dumbledore graciously, rising from his chair and joining them by the fireside, “that sometimes the best way to learn is to jump in feet first at the deep end. But never fear, you can’t get lost.”

Harry remembered vividly his first trip by floo powder and how the same assurances and instructions has been given to him right before he’d wound up in Knockturn Alley. He suddenly didn’t think this was such a good idea when Tonks disappeared in a flash of green flame. Kitty stumbled backwards involuntarily and let out a gasp, and he stepped closer to her.

Snape disappeared too without a word and then Dumbledore was holding out the pouch to Kitty.

“It’s fine,” Harry tried to assure her in a low voice as she reached into the bag, “not as fun as broomsticks though.”

She gave a weak grin and allowed Dumbledore to steer her towards the fire. He mimed her next move and for a moment she did nothing, appearing to be entranced by the very real flames before in a flurry of movement she threw in the powder, shouting ‘grim old place!’ and disappearing in a roar of flames.

Harry at once rushed forward to go next, heart suddenly hammering madly at the thought of her stumbling out of some random grate right into the path of a Death Eater or any number of other wizards she was supposed to be avoiding. However Remus merely cautioned him to wait and give her chance to get through the system before he was allowed to follow.

Travelling by floo was just as bad as he remembered and his glasses slipped down his nose as he was wrenched to a halt suddenly, finding himself stuck inside a boarded up chimney. He’d completely forgotten about the safety grate and was just reaching out to knock on the plyboard separating him from the room beyond when he was suddenly wrenched forward again.

If travelling by floo was uncomfortable, this was sickening. Harry felt like he was been battered and bashed along his way by several very heavy rolling pins and his final thought before he was spewed out into the kitchen of Grimauld Place was that he’d be seeing his breakfast very shortly.

He landed in an ungainly heap on the rug in front of the fire and had no time to gather his wits before helpful hands were lifting him to his feet. Head spinning, he cast around for Kitty to find her being ushered into one of the kitchen chairs by Mrs Weasley and looking rather tousled and green.

“You ok?” he asked her shakily, before casting a dirty look back towards the fire in time to see Remus stumble out, also looking dishevelled.

“Think I’m gonna throw up,” she moaned as Mrs Weasley hurried back and handed them both large cups of tea.

“Is it always like that?” Harry asked Bill, who’d just helped him to his feet.

“Afraid so,” he replied bracingly, “It’s an illegal connection so we had to skip on the comfort factor. You get used to it.”

“Not sure about that,” Tonks scoffed, also looking slightly worse for wear as she sat down opposite Kitty.

Harry grimaced, about to ask more about the safety of the connection when Ron, Hermione and Ginny entered the kitchen, all smiling happily when they saw they’d arrived.

“So Cathy,” began Remus, sitting down next to Tonks, “this is Grimauld Place. It’s been Order headquarters now for about...”

Harry tuned out of the introduction and the conversations that were flowing all around him and glanced around. He was back. Back in Grimauld Place. Back where Sirius’ presence, or rather lack thereof, seemed to be shouting from every wall. It was just the same as ever, still dark and oppressive, now with a slight tinge of sadness. He knew no matter how hard Mrs Weasley scrubbed, cleaned or painted, you could never get rid of the grime in this place.

No wonder Sirius went mad here.

Stuck in this place, day in and out with only Kreacher for company.

At this thought Harry looked around him suspiciously.

“Remus, where’s Kre-”

“Here he is, the nasty Potter brat, oh if my mistress knew the shame...”

The hissing voice of Kreacher preceded him into the kitchen and Harry caught Kitty's grimace of disgust as she stared, slightly open-mouthed at the new creature in front of her.

"I'd be a bit more polite to your master if I were you Kreacher," said Bill coolly, dropping into the chair next to Kitty and propping his boots on the table.

"Master?" asked Harry incredulously over the wild mutterings of the house elf.

"You inherited all of Sirius's possessions," said Remus, before gesturing toward Kreacher, "including him."

"Kreacher won't go to him! Kreacher won't! Kreacher won't!" croaked the house elf, stamping his long gnarled feet and pulling his ears, "Kreacher belongs to Miss Bellatrix, oh yes, Kreacher belongs to the Blacks, Kreacher wants his new mistress. Kreacher won't go to the Potter brat. Kreacher won't, won't, won't-

"As you can see Harry," said Remus loudly over Kreacher's continued croaks of 'won't, won't, won't', "Kreacher is showing a certain reluctance to pass into your ownership."

Harry shot everyone an incredulous look, Ron merely raised his eyebrow at him whilst Hermione looked on disapprovingly.

"I don't care," Harry said, looking in disgust at the writhing, stamping house-elf. "I don't want him."

"Won't, won't, won't, won't-

"You would rather him pass into the ownership of Bellatrix Lestrange? Bearing in mind that he has lived at the Headquarters of the Order of the Phoenix for the past year?"

Kreacher's continued shouts of 'won't, won't, won't, won't' pounded into Harry's head whilst the anger boiled at the mere mention of the name of Sirius's killer. He knew that Kreacher could not be permitted



to go and live with Bellatrix, but the idea of owning him, of having responsibility for the creature that had betrayed Sirius, was repugnant.

“To be honest,” shouted Bill interestedly over the increasing din, “we don’t even know if you do own him, inheritance charms are tricky business when bloods not involved.”

“Well, what can we do about it?” Harry asked back, as his friends planted their hands over their ears at the racket.

“Give him an order,” suggested Tonks, “If he has passed into your ownership, he’ll have to obey. We know he’s definitely not mine, believe me, I’ve tried to shut him up. Anyway, if it doesn’t work we’ll have to think of some other means of keeping him away from that bitch.”

“Won’t, won’t, won’t, won’t-”

Kreacher’s voice had risen to a scream and Harry couldn’t think straight. He could do nothing except to shout in frustration at the house-elf, now lying prostrate on the floor, beating his fists against the flagstones, “Kreacher, SHUT UP!”

Silence dropped into the room and it looked for a moment like Kreacher was going to choke. He grabbed his throat, his mouth still working furiously, his eyes bulging. After a few second of frantic gulping he recommenced his violent, albeit completely silent, tantrum.

“Well that simplified matters, seems Sirius knew what he was doing,” said Remus in relief as everyone removed their hands from their ears and wiggled fingers down them to remove the ringing noises.

“Do I, do I have to keep him with me?” asked Harry, aghast at the thought as they all stared at Kreacher’s thrashings with morbid fascination.

“Dumbledore did suggest sending him to Hogwarts to work in the kitchens,” said Bill, “at least that way the other house-elves could keep an eye on him.”

“Yeah,” said Harry in relief, “yeah, he can do that. Er - Kreacher - I want you to go to Hogwarts and work in the kitchens there with the other house-elves.”

Kreacher, who was now lying flat on his back with his arms and legs up in the air, gave Harry one upside down look of deepest loathing and, with a loud crack, vanished.

Kitty gasped while everyone else unconsciously sighed with relief.

“Thank Merlin that weird git’s gone,” said Tonks, reaching for a strange purple fruit out of the bowl in the centre of the table, “I woke up the other night to find him creeping around my room, muttering about my being a blood traitor...I wouldn’t have minded but the next morning I found out he’d stolen some of my family photos.”

“Did you get them back?” asked Ginny, looking disturbed at the thought.

“No, he said he was cleaning out like we’d told him too and he’d burnt them.”

Remus shot her a look and Mrs Weasley moved forward, “Well, now that’s all sorted, perhaps its time to get settled in before our trip?”

“Trip?” asked Ron.

“Yes, we’ll have to go and get your school supplies from Diagon Alley before you go back,” she replied as if this arrangement had been common knowledge and he was being forgetful.

“But we went at the beginning of the summer!” he protested.

“Yes, but we weren’t there long enough to get anything were we?” she suggested, shooting a quick glance in Harry’s direction.

It had been his fault of course. He'd mistaken a dog in the crowd as Sirius and had left immediately after. That had been the prodding he'd needed to flee Privet Drive and 'go barmy' as Ron had so tactfully put it.

"Besides, you're book lists have come now and you need some new robes," she said, flourishing her washing basket towards him as evidence, "so why don't you children go to your rooms and I'll call you down when we're ready?"

They all nodded and Harry moved towards Kitty, who was looking slightly confused, but Mrs Weasley got there first.

"Now, we've got a bed made up for you on the second floor with Ginny and Hermione, dear," Mrs Weasley told her, beckoning her to her feet and picking up her rucksack, "it's not much, but hopefully it's only temporary."

Harry went to smile at her encouragingly but was surprised for a moment by the rather fixed smiles that were on not only Kitty's, but also Ginny's and Hermione's face. He didn't know why, but none of them were particularly thrilled at the sleeping arrangements.

"Why don't you show her up Ginny?" asked Mrs Weasley, handing her Kitty's bag.

"Sure," said Ginny brightly, taking the bag and giving Kitty another smile.

She returned the smile half-heartedly, eyes fixed on her backpack now grasped in Ginny's hands. She looked very much as if she wanted to wrench it from the girls hands immediately and Harry wondered what was still in there. Hermione jumped to her feet to follow them out and Harry made a note to himself to ask Kitty what the sudden shift in mood was due to.

He was about to follow the girls up when Remus beckoned him over. Harry gave one last glance at Kitty's retreating form and sighed, plodding over to Remus.

"We need to talk about security arrangements for this trip," he began seriously.

Harry sighed and listened with half an ear as Remus explained the Auror presence and Hagrid's guard of honour. Although he was looking forward to seeing his half-giant friend, he felt a bit overwhelmed by the sudden return to Grimmauld Place and being faced by Kreacher and Bellatrix again and would have liked some time to acclimatise.

And, he reminded himself, acclimatise Kitty.

Kitty sighed deeply to herself, gazing around the grimy surroundings of the lounge of Grimmauld Place in distaste. She really hoped they wouldn't be staying here too long, it was depressing and boring. It's all right for Harry and that lot, she thought to herself bitterly, they get to go shopping down magical streets while she was stuck here, abandoned by Tonks and left to her own devices, even Remus was engrossed in his book.

She was still fuming at being abandoned at a fireplace after being told it wasn't necessary for her to accompany them. Necessary! She snorted to herself in irritation, already it had begun...She tried to brush the thought aside and be rational, without success.

She climbed out of the chair and began to wander around the room, inspecting the various shelves that looked almost stripped bare of trinkets and the fading spines of the books with titles that made no sense. She wondered if Harry was having fun without her, whether he missed her or whether he was too busy buying exciting magical things to even realise this was the longest they'd spent apart for weeks.

"Are you ok Cathy?" asked Remus, glancing up at her from his rather boring looking book.

“Mmm,” she agreed, picking up a nearby book and flipping through the pages absentmindedly.

“Would you like something to read?”

She snorted with laughter, before stifling it and shaking her head, she'd never managed to finish a book in her whole life and didn't think 'Nobility of the Species' would be a particularly fascinating read.

“How about something to eat or drink?” he suggested, “Have you had lunch?”

“I wasn't hungry,” she replied, pausing in her walk to study a tapestry hanging on the wall, “when do you think they'll be back.”

“Another hour or two I should imagine,” he said, closing his book quietly and laying it on the table beside him, “we have a lot of security precautions around Harry and everyone in the Order. Diagon Alley isn't safe anymore.”

She must have looked worried at this news because he gave her a comforting smile, “He'll be ok Cathy, Tonks is looking after him.”

Kitty nodded, the thought that she was there at least was comforting, even if she still did look a little peaky. So did Remus in fact, she noticed, remembering he'd been in the Hospital Wing this time yesterday. She dropped into the sofa once more and studied his appearance - this was the part werewolf movies never showed you, the aftermath, the part where the body struggles against the trauma.

“You feeling better now?” she asked, nodding towards his general appearance.

He gave her a surprised look, before pushing his greying hair out of his eyes.

“Fine, thank you.”

“What did happen to you?” she asked, “When they brought you to the hospital?”

“Oh. I was...” he began, casting around the room uncomfortably, “Sometimes, the transformations are more wearing than others.”

“Tonks said she did it,” she stated.

“Sorry?” frowned Remus in puzzlement.

“I thought you’d been attacked by Them. When I asked her who had done it, she told me she did.”

Remus continued to frown at Kitty, deep in thought. She studied him thoughtfully, Tonks opinion obviously worried him and she thought for a moment perhaps she’d just started something she shouldn’t have.

“I’m glad things worked out between you,” she said, dragging him from his thoughts.

He gave her another look, staged to look like surprise but she could see the happiness behind it.

“Thank you,” he said modestly, obviously sensing that feigning innocence was not going to work on the person that pushed them to reveal their feelings in the first place.

“How long have you, you know, liked her?” asked Kitty curiously, sitting forward in her chair.

Remus looked highly uncomfortable at the line of questioning, but gave a slight laugh at Kitty’s eager expression.

“Aw come on, you can tell me,” she cajoled, “I can tell you’re trying to keep it secret from everyone so you must be dying to talk to someone about it?”

“It’s not really a secret, per se,” Remus corrected her, “I just feel that...well perhaps it should not become wide knowledge that an Auror is involved with a werewolf.”

“Really?” asked Kitty in surprise, “Would that be a problem?”

“Oh yes,” said Remus, light tones betrayed by the bitter expression that flitted across his face for a moment, “not least for the people she works for.”

“But why?” she demanded angrily, “It’s none of their business who Tonks is seeing!”

“It’s very refreshing to hear opinions like that,” Remus laughed, “but most of the magical society have a big problem with werewolves as it is, but the thought that one of them could be linked to someone within the Ministry, who’s job it is to catch dark wizards no less? That will end in only one way.”

“But you’re not a dark wizard are you?” she demanded, “There’s obviously good and bad werewolves, just like wizards! What can they do to you anyway?”

“I’m more concerned about what they can do to Tonks,” he replied quietly, as if voicing a thought that has been praying on his mind.

Kitty thought about this for a moment, she hated the thought that some unknown government official could ruin Tonks and Remus’ relationship or lives, just because of some stupid prejudices.

“Well, screw them,” Kitty said forcefully, “it’s none of their business. Surely they’ve got bigger things to worry with a psychotic killer trying to kill everyone in the country?”

“He’s not trying to kill everyone,” sighed Remus, “although I agree that his list of those not welcome in his new dominion probably takes up half the country.”

“What do you mean?”

“Muggle-borns, half-bloods, blood traitors...” he listed, waving a hand around expansively.

“What does all that mean, half bloods?” she demanded.

“A half-blood is someone who only has one parent that is magical, like Tonks and I, her father was a muggle just like my mother,” he explained, sitting forward also and addressing Kitty as if he were giving a class, “Harry’s a pure-blood because both his parents were magical folk, but his mother Lily was muggle-born. She had two muggle parents, just like Hermione.”

Kitty was silent for a moment, obviously deep in thought.

“How can you be magic if you haven’t got magic parents?” she asked finally.

“No ones really sure why, or why some pure-bloods can’t do magic at all,” said Remus thoughtfully, “there’s plenty of theories about why, but I believe it’s just one of those things, a quirk of nature.”

“Right...but I guess being a pure-blood’s the best right? Otherwise you’d only be half magic...” Kitty pondered out loud.

“Definitely not,” said Remus so sharply that Kitty gave him an affronted look, “Sorry, I didn’t mean it like that. It’s just that this whole war is basically about that very issue. Some wizards do think pure-bloods are the best sort of wizard, the only sort. But it doesn’t matter how powerful your parents were, or if they were at all, it’s all down to the individual. I’ve know people whose parents have been some of the best duellers in the world and they could barely perform a decent hex, some muggle-borns have been the most powerful wizards we’ve ever had.”

“Oh right,” Kitty said, looking down at her fingernails for a moment, “so...wizards and muggles get together all the time right? I mean, it’s not impossible...?”



Remus gave her a knowing smile, "It's ok Cathy, you and Harry being together isn't illegal or anything."

"But you don't like it, do you?" she said.

Remus frowned, "I don't care where you come from or who your parents are Cathy."

"No, I don't mean you 'you', I mean 'you' in general, you lot don't like muggles being with wizards."

"That's not true," Remus said firmly.

"You might not think that, but I can see some of the others do. I just don't get it, is it because we're not good enough for you? I'm not good enough for him?"

"No," he said emphatically, "don't think like that."

Kitty shrugged, "I can't help it. I think they're right."

Remus stared at her for a moment, looking slightly stunned.

"You think you're not good enough for Harry?" he asked her, "Because you're a muggle?"

"No...I thought I wasn't good enough for Harry before I even found out he was a wizard or whatever," she muttered, "this just proves my theory."

"Why would you think that?" he asked her incredulously.

"Because."

"Why" he pressed.

“Well look at me! I’m just rubbish. Aren’t I? I was crap at school, I can’t get into college without a wizard screwing with someone’s mind to make them think I’m smart! Tonks has to practically adopt me because I’ve got no family or friends who care where I am! I can’t hold a job for more than a few weeks, I’m not clever or good, I’ve done things that I’m not proud of, that Harry hates me for...”

“Cathy,” said Remus firmly, looking her dead in the eye, “you are not a bad person. You’ve saved Harry’s life, twice. You saved Dumbledore. And Harry loves you for who you are! So you’re not academic, why is that a big deal? I’ve never met anyone as determined or independent as you. Since you got here you never once stopped caring, trying to help, doing the right thing.”

“But you don’t know what I did,” she whispered, eyes downcast, “you don’t know what I’ve done...”

“It’s very easy for people who’ve had an easy life to look down on what others do in desperation,” he replied quietly, “because they don’t know, don’t understand, what it’s like to have to look after yourself, believe me. It’s all about situation Cathy. Do you think you would have done half the things you’ve done in your life if you’d had Ron’s parents? Or lived in Hermione’s house? Don’t mix up being a bad person with being an unlucky one.”

Kitty nodded heavily, deep in thought.

“I just can’t help thinking,” she began awkwardly, “that all that’s just an excuse...that I’ve just gone wrong...that all this is my punishment...that someone’s having a good laugh at me because I thought everything was finally going my way, and I was finally happy, and now I have to give it all up because I don’t deserve it...”

Remus sighed heavily before giving her a slight, rueful smile, “Cathy, have you ever been in love before?”

“No,” she said blankly, his question taking her by surprise.

“Then believe me when I say it is the most incredibly rare, amazing and terrifying experience you’re ever going to go through. And that not a single day will go by that you won’t doubt yourself or the other person because you can’t possibly believe that you could be so lucky.”

“But it wouldn’t be love if it didn’t hurt sometimes, and it wouldn’t be true love if you couldn’t make sacrifices for the other person, even if that means sacrificing your own happiness.”

Kitty nodded slowly, angry and ashamed to feel tears pricking the corner of her eyes. Remus was right, she had been given the greatest gift, the chance to keep Harry, to live in a world where he still existed and he was hers. But for that privilege, she had to sacrifice her contact with him. Love him from afar and hope it would be enough. To hope that one day it would all be over and they could be together.

“I don’t think this is some greater force trying to punish you Cathy,” Remus told her softly, “you have both survived more than other people ten times your age have had to face. And despite everything you’re still together? That’s true love, and that’s what’s going to get us, get you, through this.”

She blinked away the tears, somehow Remus’ words had given her strength, but also opened a hole in her soul, a black gaping space she didn’t think she’d ever be able to fill. Perhaps it was the knowledge that the point at which her and Harry could be together, happy and free would be a long way away and may never come. Or perhaps it was the knowledge of what they could have had, if destiny had not stepped in.

“It doesn’t seem fair that we should be the only ones that have to suffer, that we should be the only ones making sacrifices,” she murmured, gazing deep into the heart of the fire that was unsuccessfully attempting to warm to chilly room.

“You’re not,” Remus told her, “we all of us are going to have to make sacrifices before the end. Whether that be sacrificing someone

we love, who we thought we were, or even our own lives. Everyone loses in war, everyone gives up a little part of themselves, a part of their souls. All of us."

"And if you truly love someone," he stated, "you've got to be prepared to give up that which is most important to yourself, to save them."

Kitty looked up at Remus swiftly, the words themselves were shocking in their brutality, but the meaning behind them was worse. All at once she could see the future unfolding before her and she knew what Remus' sacrifice would be and how it would be forced upon Tonks, against her will and understanding.

"There's no reason for you to split up with Tonks," Kitty stated flatly, causing Remus to give her a deep, searching look.

"I never said I was going to," he stated, looking away from her.

"It was implied," Kitty said forcefully, "but if loves such a precious gift, as you called it, you should hold onto it as tight as you can and not needlessly give it away. Because you'll only be half a person."

Remus stood up impulsively, picking up the book he'd been reading and taking it over to the shelves.

"The whole point of sacrifice Cathy, is giving something precious up, for the greater good. And it may not seem like the right course of action now, but in time, it will."

Kitty didn't now whether to be angered or saddened by his words, whether to rebel against what he said, or believe it and listen to the darkness in her heart that whispered that he was right. It was the reason a few days ago she'd pulled a trigger that would have ended her life, it was the reason she'd known then as she did now that one day Harry could die, because of her.

"But I didn't say I was going to split up with Tonks," he said, turning back to her, unreadable expression on his face, "I was merely trying

to help you put your own situation, Harry's situation, into context. Help you realise that you're not alone and that if the time came, I would take the same course as you."

"You would do it?" she asked him.

"Yes. I'd hurt her to save her."

Harry had been to Diagon Alley twice already this summer, once to withdraw his money and pick up some potions before he ran away and once with the others to visit the Twins shop. On that occasion he has been so wrapped up in Sirius' death and the Department of Mysteries he hardly paid attention to his surroundings. Now however he had a chance to properly look around and he was surprised by how much the wizarding shopping centre had changed. Instead of exciting and colourful displays in every window, now official ministry wanted posters plastered every free surface so that a tide of smirking and scowling Death Eaters watched their slightly hesitant procession down the cobbled surface. Hagrid was carefully steering them to the shops they needed, there was no time for window shopping or dawdling.

"I hate these posters," said Hermione with a frown, pulling her cloak around her shoulders as she avoided the range of posters glaring out from Eyelops Owl Emporium.

Harry murmured in agreement, catching sight of Bellatrix Lestrange's face and feeling a hot swooping anger fill his stomach. He looked away from her defiantly.

"Makes you feel like you're being watched, don't they?" Ginny said, and she and Hermione drew together unconsciously.

"Hey look, there's some of Cathy's," Ron said suddenly, pointing over to a nearby apothecary's window.

Harry was about to ask what he was talking about when he caught sight of the line of posters Ron had pointed at. They were indeed Kitty's drawings that everyone had been talking about since he'd woken up and all at once he was taken aback by its horrible likeness

to a Death Eater he only vaguely remembered. The nearest of them had been charmed to move like a normal wizarding picture and as the four of them gathered around the window it scowled out at them.

“Brandon Saracen,” read Hermione in a low voice, “wanted for his assistance in the break-out of Azkaban and Death Eater activities. I’ve never heard of him, have you?”

Ron and Ginny shook their heads wordlessly.

“Harry, have you?” asked Hermione tremulously, as if afraid of his reaction.

“I-” he began before frowning in puzzlement, “no...”

Hermione studied his expression for a moment and Harry couldn’t help but fight a wave of sudden panic and shame. How could he not know this Death Eater when Kitty could draw such a perfect likeness to him?

“Harry?” called Hagrid, standing a little way away from them looking slightly annoyed, “There’s no time fer dilly-dallyin’, we’re to get y’tings and leave, quick as we can.”

“Sorry Hagrid,” Hermione said, hurrying both herself and Ginny along towards Madam Malkin’s.

“What’s up with you?” muttered Ron under his breath as they followed Hermione and Ginny, “You did recognise him didn’t you? What’s the story?”

“I...I didn’t recognise him,” Harry replied in a low voice, “that’s what I’m worried about.”

“Why, do you think-” began Ron before they suddenly walked into the back of the girls, who were outside the door to the robes shop.

“Migh’ be a bit of a squeeze in there with all o’ us,” Hagrid was saying, bending down to peer through the window, “I’ll stand guard outside, all righ’?”

They all nodded and Harry followed Ginny into the little shop. It appeared at first glance to be empty but no sooner had the door swung shut behind them that they heard a familiar voice issuing from behind a rack of dress robes in spangled green and blue.

“...not a child, in case you hadn’t noticed Mother. I am perfectly capable of shopping alone.”

Harry froze in his tracks and judging by the panicked look Hermione threw towards both himself and Ron, she recognised the voice as well. Harry felt his fingers curl around his wand almost unconsciously. Somewhere to the right of them there was a clucking noise and a voice Harry recognised as Madam Malkin said, “Now dear, your mother’s quite right, none of us is supposed to go wandering around on our own anymore, it nothing to do with being a child-”

“Watch where you’re sticking that pin, will you!”

Harry felt his insides seething with hatred as Draco Malfoy appeared from behind a rack wearing a handsome set of dark green robes that glittered with pins around the hem and the edges of the sleeves. He strode to the mirror and examined himself; it was a few moment before he noticed Harry, Ron and Hermione reflected over his shoulder.

His light grey eyes narrowed as he and Harry locked gaze, each battling for the most hate filled glare they could manage. It wasn’t hard for Harry, what seemed like only days ago he’d been glaring into those grey eyes, this time belonging to Malfoy senior, as he taunted him about Kitty in that grotty tunnel beneath Wolverhampton.

“Potter,” he hissed finally, spinning around so that the pins in his robes shimmered in the light, “what are you doing here?”

“Buying robes?” Harry suggested coolly, amazed at how well he was controlling his anger, he knew perfectly well what Malfoy meant, “Pleased to see me?”

Malfoy scowled and Harry flicked his gaze down to the wand he had in his hand - would he dare try anything here?

“Just the four of you is it?” asked Malfoy, pink splotches developing on his pale cheeks.

“Yeah,” interjected Ron as Harry narrowed his eyes at Malfoy’s calculating look, “what’s it to you?”

“Just thought Potter here would be dying to show off his latest sacrifice,” he spat.

It took Harry a mere millisecond to pull out his wand and point it with a trembling hand towards him. Draco seemed to expecting this because he also had hoisted his wand up challengingly.

“I don’t want wands drawn in my shop!” Madam Malkin said hastily, backing away from the group as Harry breathed quickly, anger flooding his veins.

Hermione, who was standing slightly behind them, whispered, “No don’t, honestly, it’s not worth it...”

“Yeah, like you’d dare do magic outside school,” sneered Malfoy, and Harry felt an enormous sense of satisfaction that his use of magic would still be hidden from the Ministry thanks to his summer exploits.

“That’s quite enough!” said Madam Malkin sharply, looking over her shoulder for support, “Madam - please-”

Narcissa Malfoy strolled out from behind the clothes rack. Harry felt a horrible jolt in his stomach as he looked into the smoothly arrogant face that, for all its pallor, still resembled her sisters. All at once he was back in the Department of Mysteries, hearing that taunting voice



as Sirius's face registered a momentary look of surprise, before disappearing forever.

"Put those away," she said coldly to Harry and Ron, "If you attack my son again, I shall ensure it is the last thing you'll ever do."

"Really?" asked Harry in a shaky voice, trying not to look unbalanced, "Going to get a few Death Eater pals to try and do me in, again?"

Madam Malkin squealed and clutched her heart.

"Really you shouldn't accuse - dangerous thing to say - now wands away - please!"

"Surely you read the news?" Harry asked her contemptuously, "It can't have escaped your notice her loser of a husband has escaped from Azkaban?"

Malfoy made an angry movement towards Harry, but stumbled over his overlong robes. Ron laughed loudly.

"Don't you dare talk to my mother like that, Potter!" Malfoy snarled.

"It's alright Draco," said Narcissa, restraining him with her thin white fingers upon his shoulder. "I expect Potter will be reunited with dear Sirius long before my husband's good name is cleared. Yes, I'm quite certain both he, and any associates he may have acquired, will be meeting the same sticky end as his parents before long."

Harry raised his wand higher, incensed.

"Harry, no!" moaned Hermione, grabbing his arm and attempting to push it down by his side, "Think....you mustn't...she doesn't know what she's talking about...you'll be in such trouble!"

"I don't care," Harry hissed to her, "you know who she's talking about!"

“Harry!” she cautioned in a low, panicked voice, “Don’t let on you know what she’s talking about!”

Madame Malkin dithered for a moment on the spot, then seemed to decide to act as though nothing was happening in the hope that it wouldn’t. She bent towards Malfoy, who was still glaring at Harry.

“I think this left sleeve could come up a little bit more dear, let me just-”

“Ouch!” bellowed Malfoy, slapping her hand away, “watch where you’re putting your pins, woman! Mother - I don’t think I want these any more-”

He pulled the robes over his head and threw them on to the floor at Madam Malkin’s feet.

“You’re right, Draco,” said Narcissa, with a contemptuous glance at Hermione, “now I know the kind of scum that shops here...we’ll do better at Twilfitt and Tatting’s.”

And with that, the pair of them strode out of the shop, Malfoy taking care to bang as hard as he could into Ron on the way out.

“Well, really!” said Madam Malkin, snatching up the fallen robes and moving the tip of her wand over them like a vacuum cleaner, so that it removed the dust.

She went into the back room and Harry spun around towards Ron and Hermione, still incandescent with rage.

“She was talking about Kitty!” he exploded instantly, “How dare she-”

“Harry!” Hermione moaned again, pleading him for caution, “Don’t say her name! Don’t let them see they’re getting to you! That’s what they want!”

“Don’t let them see they’re getting to me!” repeated Harry incredulously, “they just threatened Ki-”

“Don’t Harry!” Ron interjected in a hissing whisper, “Hermione’s right, you can’t talk about this here - they’re just going to go back to Lucius Malfoy or the other Death Eaters and tell them about her, that you’re still together!”

“But-” began Harry angrily before pausing, “Surely they know we’re still together?”

“How are they even supposed to know you’re still alive? Or that she’s alive and still around?” Hermione told him, “Last they knew you’d been fatally poisoned!”

“Voldemort knows I’m still alive,” scoffed Harry, ignoring their shudders at the name, “and if he knows that he knows Ki - he knows she’s still with me.”

“Doesn’t mean we can be careless,” Hermione said, pale faced as Harry fully digested what he’d just said, “If you’re going to go around bellowing her name every time Malfoy goads you she’s going to be in real trouble!”

Harry stepped back slightly, feeling as if he’d just been slapped and he rounded on Hermione furiously.

“How dare you say that! I’m not going to let her get hurt!”

“You might not be able to stop it,” Hermione told him dismissively, “not if you behave like this. Now stop and think for a second ok? You might actually realise I’m right!”

Harry, feeling stung but knowing deep down she was right bit back his retort and glared at the doorway where the Malfoy’s had just departed.

“Listen, let’s just get our robes,” Ron suggested shakily, prodding Ginny forward, “the sooner we get those sorted out, the sooner we can get home.”

Harry merely nodded and moved over to one of the racks, snapping through the hangers unseeingly as Madam Malkin tried to sell Hermione men’s robes, mind whirring. He’d hated this feeling of impending separation from Kitty, always concentrating on how much he’d miss her. But now a whole new frightening world of possibility had opened up to him. A world where Death Eaters and Voldemort would be out searching for her, intent on revenge or using her to get to him. Now they knew what she meant to him, now Voldemort had looked into his mind and seen his feelings.

She was in danger and he couldn’t stand it or stop it.

It was approaching dusk before Harry and the Weasley’s left Diagon Alley, flooing to the Burrow as a precaution before once more braving the illegal connection to Grimauld Place. Prepared for the ride this time, Harry managed to keep his feet as he stumbled out onto the hearth rug, coughing up the soot he’d inadvertently swallowed. One by one they gathered in the kitchen and Harry placed his bags on the table as he looked around for Kitty but found only Remus, sitting reading a newspaper.

“She’s upstairs in her room,” he said in answer to Harry’s unspoken question.

“Everyone pack your things away in your trunks now so we don’t have to rush around doing it before you go!” Mrs Weasley called to them all as they made to leave the kitchen.

Harry grabbed his bags again and headed to the hall with the others, Mrs Weasley’s promise of dinner in ten minutes ringing in their ears.

As they made their way up the stairs, exhausted from the days shopping and the new mysteries they’d thrown up, Harry pondered everything he’d seen and heard. He had run into Draco Malfoy in Madam Malkins and then again later in Knockturn Alley, the second time of course he had not seen them as they had been safely stowed

under the cloak. It unnerved him to know Malfoy was plotting to do something he didn't know.

As Hermione, Ginny and Kitty were sharing a room, they led the way in, pushing the door open to find Kitty lying on the bed headphones clamped over her ears. Harry smiled to himself, a wave of relief passing over him for some reason. He attempted to creep up on her and catch her unawares. However, her eyes snapped open before he was halfway across the room, obviously alerted to their presence somehow and breaking out into a wide smile as wrenched the earphones off.

“At last!” she exclaimed half-anxiously, half-relieved, “I was beginning to think something had happened to you! Everything ok?”

“Fine,” he grumbled, as everyone greeted her, dropping his shopping with the others as they found various places to sit and sprawl, “Tiring. You?”

“Yeah fine,” she relied, pulling him down to sit next to her, “been listening to music mostly. Oh, and I was chatting to Remus too.”

He nodded, mind too fixed on today's intrigues to wonder why she felt it was important to tell him that.

“So, did you bring me a present?” she joked as Harry grinned slightly, picking up his bags and placing them on the quilt in front of them.

“Not unless you're interested in The Standard Book of Spells, Grade 6,” he said with a grimace, showing her the leather bound book.

“Actually, I am,” she replied, picking it up and flicking through it randomly, “So where's the spell for turning people into frogs?”

“Page 395,” Hermione said promptly without thinking.

There was a moments shocked silence before everyone burst out laughing.

“Only you Hermione,” Ginny commented, shaking her head in amusement.

“Well, it is...” she said defensively, trying to hide her red cheeks behind her own spell book.

Harry cast Kitty a look, who merely grinned slightly and passed him the book back.

“So, did the press catch sight of you?” she asked teasingly as she leaned back against the wall, “Am I going to read about your trip in the celeb spotting column of a glossy magazine?”

Ron sniggered appreciatively and Harry threw him a look, “No, I didn’t see any reporters. We did bump into someone else though.”

“I can tell from that look it wasn’t someone you wanted to see?” Kitty guessed.

“Definitely not,” Harry said, remembering the familiar anger that coursed through his veins every time he saw Draco Malfoy’s pinched, pale face, “a guy from my year...his name’s Draco Malfoy-”

“Malfoy?” cut in Kitty, sitting up a little straighter, “as in, Malfoy from the tunnel, the one who I, you know...”

Harry remembered all too clearly that day in the tunnel, when Voldemort had finally caught up with him and Kitty had shot Lucius Malfoy.

“That was his dad,” he told her simply, ignoring the other three looks, “and trust me, like father like son.”

She frowned deeply, shifting anxiously, “So what did he have to say about everything?”

“Well, he was definitely surprised to see me,” Harry told her, “and he had the usual threats and everything, but it what’s happened after we first saw him that I think was really suspicious.”

Here Ron, Hermione and Ginny shared despairing looks, as if they’d heard all this already and had thought they’d finally coaxed him away from the subject. Harry ignored them and turned more towards Kitty, retelling the story of following Malfoy to Borgin and Burke’s, his demands for something to be kept safe and odd behaviour.

“So what do you think he’s up to?” she asked him when he was finished.

“Well,” Harry began, shooting the others a pointed look, “I think he’s been made a Death Eater.”

The others all sighed, tutted and rolled their eyes respectively but Kitty merely frowned.

“Makes sense,” she agreed, “if his old man’s one and this family’s as black as you say.”

“Don’t encourage him,” said Hermione despairingly.

“In what?” snapped Kitty, “It makes sense and I’m sure Harry’s got a better idea of what they’re up to than you.”

The sudden shift in her tone caught everyone by surprise, not least of all Harry who gave her a slightly astonished look. Though he was glad Kitty agreed with his theory, he was taken slightly aback by the force of her rebuttal.

“Kitty,” he said, shooting her questioning look, but Hermione merely jumped in.

“I’m sure Harry probably does,” she said, obviously restraining her words, “but Malfoy’s only a student after all, I don’t exactly think You-know-Who would want him in the club - the Death Eaters are supposed to be his best, most loyal supporters.”

“You can’t say the Malfoy’s aren’t loyal supporters of the cause Hermione!” countered Harry, glossing over Kitty’s strange outburst.

“I just saying there’s a million and one other reasons for what Malfoy was doing,” she said, folding her arms and looking to Ron and Ginny for help

“What possible other explanation could there be? He was acting so suspiciously! He was in a darks arts shop in Knockturn Alley for Merlin’s sake!”

“I’m not saying it wasn’t fishy!” Hermione said impatiently, “But it’s not the only explanation! He could have been in there for any number of reasons!”

“Yeah, maybe he’s broken his Hand of Glory?” suggested Ron, looking a little fearful to be wading into the discussion, “Remember that shrivelled-up arm Malfoy had?”

“But what about when he said ‘Don’t forget to keep that one safe’?” asked Harry expressively, “That sounded to me like Borgin’s got another one of the broken objects, and Malfoy wants both.”

“Doesn’t mean he’s a Death Eater Harry,” said Ginny, looking unconvinced, “I mean, he’s only sixteen! Do you think You-know-Who would let Malfoy join?”

“I think it makes sense,” stated Kitty, nodding to Harry, “from what Harry says he’s already got the tattoo, it sounds like it’s a family tradition, and who better to get enrolled than someone who’s going to be seeing Harry every day at school - no need to break into the castle?”

Harry nodded emphatically, “See? It makes sense!”

The others look thoroughly unconvinced, but were saved from further discussion by Mrs Weasley’s voice floating up towards them calling them to dinner. Harry sighed, he was absolutely convinced now and



was frustrated that none of the others were taking him seriously. Ginny and Hermione left quickly, shooting a look back towards Kitty and Ron hurried after them, apparently not wanting to be caught out by Harry without backup. Kitty unfolded herself off the bed and made to leave but Harry grabbed her hand and pulled her back.

“What was all that about?” he asked her.

“All what?” she asked, all blue-eyed innocence.

“You and Hermione?” he reminded her, not letting her play him.

“What? I was just sticking up for you,” Kitty shrugged, “she was bang out of order.”

“Right...” said Harry, frowning at her suspiciously, “and that’s it?”

“What else would it be?” she asked him, also frowning now.

“A Hermione-in-general problem?” he guessed, carefully measuring her reaction.

“I don’t have a problem with Hermione,” she sighed wearily with such honesty that Harry instantly knew she was lying.

“You do don’t you!” he exclaimed, before closing the bedroom door and turning to her, “Why?”

“I don’t!” she protested in surprise, “in case you haven’t noticed I’m in a crap mood because I’ve been dumped in this hell-hole while you’ve been off shopping without me! I couldn’t give a shit about Hermione.”

“Don’t change the subject,” Harry interjected, “why have you got a problem with Hermione?”

“I don’t!”

“You do, come on, you know you can’t lie to me anymore!” he told her.

“Fine!” said Kitty throwing up her arms in defeat, “I do have a problem with her! She’s a bossy, arrogant, superior, know-it-all who thinks she’s so much better than me and that she has some kind of possession of you!”

“What?!” Harry exclaimed incredulously, “She’s none of those things!”

“Oh, I knew you’d stick up for her,” said Kitty, throwing her arms up in the air and striding across the room.

“She’s my friend,” Harry stated.

“Yeah, and I’m your girlfriend,” she retorted, spinning around and planting her hands on her hips, “and before you say anything, this is their problem, not mine - they’ve never liked me.”

“That’s not true!” Harry said, thrown off balance by this revelation, he’d always been told by everyone that they were good friends.

“It is,” Kitty stated firmly. “She was the first one to point out I could be getting my memories blasted once you woke up, and she accused me of getting you so stoned that you let yourself get caught!”

“Wh - really?” he exclaimed, taken aback.

“Yeah,” she laughed nastily, “I’d use the word witch hunt but I guess it has a different meaning now.”

“Well...Hermione’s just...” began Harry, slightly desperately, “she’s a little hard to get to know, me and Ron hated her when we first met, she grows on you...you get used to her.”

“I don’t want to,” she said stubbornly.

“I’m sure she was just upset,” he tried to make her understand, “when she speaks to you properly and gets to know you like I do then-”

“You know that’s not going to happen, don’t you?”

“Why not?” he asked, slightly angered by her refusal to even try.

“She doesn’t like me,” she pressed, trying to make him understand, “she just looks down her nose at me, all posh and high-and-mighty, all she sees is some common piece of dirt that’s taken you away from her!”

Harry was silent for a few moments, he had just known Kitty would say that.

“And what do you do to her, look down your nose at her,” he stated, turning to look at her, “all you see is some posh girl which can’t have anything else to her, right?”

Kitty stared at Harry.

“That’s not true!” she said, scandalised by his accusation.

“It is,” he sighed, “you love being the underdog, just so you can bite harder.”

“What?” she asked incredulously, “She hated me before I even opened my mouth!”

“And what came out of it when you did?” he asked her, leaning back against the door, “Did you try and be nice, try and make friends with them?”

“In case you didn’t notice - you were lying in bed in a coma, dying for all I knew, I didn’t care about making friends or being nice!” she told him furiously.

“Ok, ok,” he said, holding his hands up in a conciliatory manner, “I know that, I’m sorry. I just know that you could get along, if you looked past all the differences.”

“I’m making the effort aren’t I?” she demanded, spreading her arms as if showing the evidence, “I’m here and I’m trying! She just...gets on my nerves! I can’t help it!”

“I know that...I just want you to-”

“What? Be one big happy family?” she asked with a slight laugh, “come on Harry, you know that’s not going to happen right? I love you, despite all this crazy magic stuff, but that doesn’t mean I have to love your world or your friends...you don’t know what it was like between us before you woke up - we were practically at war...but I called the truce, if that makes any difference?”

“Really?” Harry asked, before giving a sigh and raking his hands through his hair, “What about Ron and the others?”

“Well Ron wasn’t too bad, guess he didn’t have the balls to break us up though to be honest, but he came and spoke to me eventually...” she said with a slight grin, “and I guess Ginny doesn’t like me for entirely normal reasons, still having a massive thing for you and all.”

“I thought she’d got past all that,” Harry said vaguely, “and I guess Ron was sticking up for Hermione-”

“Again, for normal reasons,” she replied with a glint in her eye, “having a massive thing for her and all.”

“Don’t get me started on those two,” he said, rolling his eyes, “they’ve been like that for years.”

“Talk about sexual tension,” she laughed, before walking over to Harry and intertwining her hands with his, “but meanwhile, I’m trying my hardest, I was just snappy earlier because...well...I missed you today.”

Harry nodded unhappily, "I missed you too."

"More than you thought you would?" she guessed shrewdly, "Yeah, me too. Doesn't bode well for the future does it, if we can't go a few hours without going a bit mental."

"Makes me not want to go back to Hogwarts," he told her seriously.

"Hey, don't be stupid, you've got a destiny to fulfil remember?" she said, half-jokingly, "Anyway, all I can offer you is a choice of flats complete with antagonistic ex-friends and fist fights in clubs."

Harry gave a slight laugh, "Are you kidding, those were the high-points...I wish we were still there, that none of this had happened."

"No point thinking about 'what ifs'," she shrugged, "it did happen and we're the stronger for it. You're still here, I've still got my memories, we'll figure out a way to be together again. Even I guess, if it takes a little time."

"Very philosophical of you," Harry said, "since when did you become so wise?"

"Must have been that knock to the head," she joked, "now come on, let's get to dinner before they think we're up to no good. And watch me beam and smile and be nice to your friends."

"There's no point pretending if you really feel like that about them," Harry countered as he led her out onto the landing.

"I told you I'm making an effort right?" she replied, "Anyway, we've only got one day left so I guess I'll just have to cope."

Harry gave a grim smile, he was just as aware of the time ticking down as her. It made him want to savour every last second with her and he had planned to spend the evening with her in one of the rooms dotted around the house without the Order or his friends to disturb them. However, before Harry even made it to the kitchen table,

Remus took him aside and informed him that Dumbledore had other plans for him that evening. He needed him to accompany him to some mysterious location that night and he did not have time to question him further before Mrs Weasley was beckoning him over to the table.

Harry sat down, feeling angry at Dumbledore and cheated out of more precious time with Kitty, who looked half-upset, half-angry at the news and spent the dinner silently imploring at him over their roast.

“Just say you don’t want to go!” Kitty hissed to Harry, who was looking uncomfortable, backed up against a wall in his room.

“I can’t,” he explained, trying to will her into understanding, “it’s Dumbledore! And besides, it might be important!”

She glared at him, hands on her hips, “Harry, we’ve got literally hours left now, can’t you do this later? What are you doing anyway?”

“I don’t know,” he said.

“When are you going to be back?” she asked, looking upset.

“I don’t know,” he repeated wearily.

“Harry!” she exclaimed incredulously.

“Listen Kitty,” he told her, taking her by the arms and looking at her seriously, “I guess the reason I haven’t been told is because it is important and I have to do it because it’s just something I have to do. And it’s what I’m going to have to keep doing.”

“So, basically you’re saying get used to it, right?” she stated, glaring at him mutinously from under her eyelashes.

Harry sighed before shrugging.

“Yeah.”

She stared at him for a moment, before her shoulders sagged and she looked to the floor.

“Fine,” she said monotonously.

“It’s fine?” he asked her eyebrows raised at her sudden change of heart.

“Man’s gotta do what a man’s gotta do, right?” she said, looking up at him with an attempt at a smile.

“Something like that,” he replied, before leaning down towards her and kissing her slowly.

She coiled her arms around his neck, desperate to stop him leaving by any means possible but Harry’s name being shouted from the kitchen below interrupted them. He broke away, pulling something out of the trunk at the foot of his bed as Kitty watched him, frowning.

“Is it going to be dangerous?” she asked him, trying not to sound as worried as she felt.

“Doubt it, I’ll be with Dumbledore,” he told her, standing up straight and swinging a long black cloak around his shoulders.

“What’s this?” she exclaimed in amusement, plucking at the heavy, black fabric.

“Travelling cloak,” he said, slight pink tinge colouring his cheeks, “I’m guessing this is a magical thing we’re doing.”

“Do you seriously wear that thing?” she asked, unable to stop the laughter escaping her lips.

“Yeah,” he replied, “wait till you see my school uniform!”

“Do you have a pointy hat?” she teased playfully.

Harry merely poked his tongue out, before stooping back down to her trunk and pulling out a black battered thing and throwing it towards her.

“Day wear,” he said, grinning as Kitty howled with laughter, ramming the hat onto her head, “thankfully, it’s only for special occasions. Suits you.”

Kitty continued to giggle, skipping over to the small, heavily cracked mirror propped up on the fireplace and examining her reflection. After a moment she turned to him, pulling an odd, gurning-type face.

“Hubble bubble toil and trouble,” she cackled, fingers clenched into claws, “fire burn and cauldron bubble...”

“You’re so immature,” Harry stated, fighting to keep a straight face as he surveyed her antics.

“HARRY!” came the shout once more from the kitchen below.

Kitty pulled the hat off with a heavy sigh and chucked it back to him.

“Go on then,” she said with a brave smile on her face, “best not keep Pops waiting.”

“I’ll be back soon,” he promised.

“You better be,” she said, half-jokingly.

She followed Harry down to the kitchen, where Tonks, Remus and Dumbledore were waiting. The old man nodded to Harry.

“We shall not be travelling by floo this evening Harry,” he told him, already showing Harry back towards the kitchen door.

Harry gave him a surprised look but followed wordlessly and Kitty could do nothing but give him a pathetic wave as they left the room. She waited a few moments, before hearing the front door bang shut.



“Don’t worry Cathy,” Tonks said bracingly, “they’ll be back in a few hours.”

“Sure,” she said glumly, before turning towards the two, “no time at all.”

Tonks gave her a sympathetic look before brightening up.

“Here’s an idea, why don’t we have some fun while we’re waiting?” she suggested.

“What sort of fun?” asked Kitty, giving Tonks a look that plainly said, ‘what fun can we have here?’

“Well, we’ve got to get you a new look remember?” suggested Tonks with a grin, “Why don’t we try a bit of experimentation?”

Kitty grinned too, she’d forgotten about her re-branding and after taking in Tonks’s bubblegum pink bob she was sporting today, she was going to the best person for style advice.

“That sounds cool,” she agreed, and Remus gave a mild smile.

“I’ll leave you two ladies to it then,” he said, already making to leave the room, “I’ll see you soon Cathy, good bye Tonks.”

Tonks watched him with an odd expression on her face as he floored out of the kitchen, but turned back to Kitty quickly, smile back on her face.

“Right, let’s sort out the new you! Best go up to the bathroom I think.”

Kitty followed Tonks down the dark narrow corridor and up the stairs, pausing only to fling out an arm as Tonks missed a step and nearly fell back on top of her. They passed the slightly ajar door to the girls room where Hermione, Ginny and Ron were chatting amongst each other and headed up to the next flight of stairs.

Kitty hadn't managed to explore the higher levels of the house yet, and if she was honest with herself, it was because the place scared her a little. She didn't know how many of those crabby goblin-type creatures were wandering about and had enough strangeness to cope with already. This place was like Hogwarts, it was crammed with moving pictures and paintings, except these didn't look particularly friendly or welcoming.

Tonks broke into her silent reverie as she held open a large wooden door, making a sweeping gesture for her to enter. The bathroom reminded Kitty of those seen in the manor houses you had to pay a fortune to wander round. It had a massive free-standing porcelain bath and taps shaped liked serpents and looked as if its glory days were long gone. The massive gilded mirror was flaking and spotted with age, the air hung heavy with must and the copper pipes shone vivid green.

"Charming," said Kitty dryly.

"Isn't it just?" Tonks replied brightly, pulling her wand out and creating a selection of stools and chairs for them.

Kitty stood on a high stool in front of the mirror and regarded herself critically. It was the first time she'd seen properly studied herself for some time and she was surprised to see she looked a bit thinner in the face, definitely paler. And older.

"Man, you got anti-wrinkle cream too?" she asked Tonks, attempting to smooth the bags under her eyes out.

"You're only 16 Cathy," laughed Tonks, "that's nothing a good night's sleep can sort out, wait to you get to my grand old age - then you'll know about wrinkles."

"Yeah right, grand old age of 22?" guessed Kitty, "anyway, I've seen the movies, I know you people have got plenty of magic potions and brews. Wouldn't be surprised if you were really 60 or something."

Tonks merely chuckled, before twirling her wand again. Kitty couldn't help but gasp as she pulled a small box out of the air, before it rapidly grew in her hands to become a heavy-duty vanity case that would be better described as a chest.

"Now," began Tonks, grinning at Kitty's stunned face, "I don't actually have to bother with all this lot, but we're gonna do this the semi-muggle way right?"

"Sure," she agreed, eyeing the wand a little nervously, for some reason she felt as if she was about to go under the knife, "and what do you mean you don't need this stuff?"

"Well, you know how I change my hair and eye colour every now and then?"

"Magic right?" Kitty guessed.

"Sort of," she grinned, before an intense look of concentration passed over her face and suddenly the pink bob of hair had become short, purple spikes.

Kitty gaped at her before bursting into wild laughter.

"That's the coolest thing I ever seen! Do it again!"

She watched in amazement as Tonks switched her hair backwards and forwards, before moving on to her eyes, nose, ears...eventually Tonks was sat in front of a young girl around her own age that looked vaguely familiar. She thought hard as she tried to place it, before a sudden recollection of being at her stepfather's flat came to her and the uneasy prickle on the back of her neck that had told her she was being followed.

"That was you!" she exclaimed, "the girl that followed me from Harry's, some big drama about your boyfriend in town? I knew you were following me!"

“So much for stealth,” laughed Tonks, sliding back into her usual appearance, “that was me trying to find out whether you really were interested in Harry or if you were a Death Eater in disguise. It’s how we found out who you were and where you lived.”

“Right,” nodded Kitty, a little unsure how she felt about this.

Knowing Tonks now as she did she couldn’t feel angry at her for trying to protect Harry. But still, the thought of being followed crept her out...If it was so easy for Tonks, it would be easy for any of Them too. Suddenly she didn’t think a new haircut was going to be a very good hiding technique. After a moments hesitation, she shared this worry with Tonks.

“Only very few witches and wizards can do what I can do Kitty, it a very rare gift. Everyone else has to do it the hard way. And luckily for us the hard way leaves very identifiable markers. Some of the protection spells we’re going to give you will help you see when people have magically altered their appearance.”

She nodded, that sounded a little better, but left her with even more questions.

“Come on anyway, let’s give Harry a surprise for when he comes back!” suggested Tonks, perhaps sensing how Kitty was feeling, “What do you have in mind?”

Kitty looked at herself in the mirror again for a long moment, taking in the multicoloured dreadlocks, her pierced lip and nose, the make-up, the clothes. It was funny, but after seeing such bizarrely dressed people around her for so long she had become accustomed to them. Now she felt that she looked odd and out of place. The change couldn’t come soon enough in her opinion, she felt like the person she saw in the mirror now wasn’t the person who was doing the looking.

Maybe Harry was right, maybe she had changed more than she realised.

“Let’s get rid of this lot first,” she suggested, trailing her finger through the knotted, slightly dirty dreadlocks.

“Your wish is my command,” began Tonks, flourishing her wand.

She dropped into a high stool next to Kitty and began to draw the wand down each braid of hair. Kitty watched in amazement as it unravelled slowly, becoming slightly frizzy, but definitely straight hair. She got the feeling the process could be done in a few moments in reality, but Tonks seemed just as keen to take her time and chat away with Kitty.

She was only answering with half her brain, too busy watching the new Kitty appear. Or perhaps it wasn’t the new Kitty, but the real one. After around ten minutes she finished and sat back, admiring her handiwork. Kitty’s head was surrounded by a halo of fuzzy, crimped and dirty hair. The sight was not becoming.

“Maybe a little bit more work?” suggested Tonks with a laugh, “let’s give it a nice wash.”

Again the wand flicked backwards and forwards and Kitty had the first dry shower of her life. She felt refreshed and clean, despite sitting in exactly the same position as before and not getting wet or soapy. Her hair hung down straight now, a murky mess of colours and developing a slight wave. She tried to remember what her hair had been like before. Straightish and mousy brown, completely forgettable.

“What colour?” asked Tonks, wand hovering ready.

“How about...black?” suggested Kitty.

The tip of the wand touched the crown of her head and Kitty felt as if someone were pouring warm water onto it. In the mirror she saw the black colour creep down to the tips of her hair, deepening in colour and shine until Tonks sat back.

“I look so pale,” said Kitty, examining her reflection with distaste, “can we change it?”

“I’ve got unlimited colour and time,” she said, “what next?”

“How about brown?”

Again the motion was repeated, and again Kitty just didn’t feel right. They tried blonde, red, back to black, dark brown and finally, because she was frustrated, green.

“I don’t like having just one colour I guess,” she said finally, surveying her green halo.

Tonks nodded in agreement before thinking for a moment.

“How about I try something out?” she asked and Kitty merely shrugged.

Tonks blocked her view of the mirror and set to work, again the warmth of the colour trickled down across her head and she caught sight of a reddy-brown lock of hair escaping Tonks’ fingers. This colouring took a little longer and Kitty noticed a few extra flourishes of the wand before she finally stepped back.

As soon as she saw it she knew it was the one. The hair was indeed a dark reddy-brown, but Tonks had smattered it with subtle highlights of red and gold that seemed to blend in seamlessly. It just looked...right.

“Perfect,” she breathes, running her fingers through her hair for the first time in years, “A little shorter though, to here.”

Tonks obliged.

“And maybe a long fringe?”

More hair fluttered to the floor. When she was finally finished Tonks stood back and admired her handwork.

“Amazing,” she nodded happily to herself, “not too flashy to get your attention, but just a little spark of rebellion right?”

“Yeah!” agreed Kitty, jumping off her stool and admiring her new do.

After a moment she reached up and pulled the nose stud out, dropping it with a clatter onto the shelf below the mirror. Next came the stud on the lip and after a moment's thought she took off the ear cuffs until all she was left with was the earrings and an eyebrow bar. She decided to leave that in, for old times sake.

“Are they all staying out for good?” asked Tonks in surprise, “I don't really think we need to go that far.”

“No, I want to,” she said, looking at her reflection and somehow feeling...lighter, more comfortable in her new skin.

“I'll heal the holes then,” said Tonks in some surprise.

After the holes from the various studs and cuffs had gone, Tonks turned to her vanity case and began to root about in it, leaving Kitty to have a sudden thought and reached for a cloth. She scrubbed off the heavy black eye make-up, excessive eye-liner and shadowing, foundation and lip tint. She regarded herself critically, she had worn that combination for years - how many years had it been?

Half formed thoughts and emotions were swirling around her, half feeling sad to be saying goodbye to Kitty, the other half rejoicing in the arrival of...Kaitlyn?

Where had that come from? She turned the name around in her mind for some time as she reapplied a minimal amount of eyeliner, shadow and mascara.

Kaitlyn Earl. No she'd need a new last name now...Kaitlyn something. Something beginning with E to keep her initials? No, she didn't particularly want her mother's name anyway. She regarded her new make-up, it was amazing how much difference not having heavy

black eyes did to the rest of her features. And the lack of foundation on her pale skin was a genius idea.

Kaitlyn Weston?

Nope.

Kaitlyn Roberts?

Nah.

Kaitlyn Potter.

The mascara wand she been aimlessly wielding clattered to the floor as she stared at herself in surprise. Forget Kaitlyn, where had that come from?

“ You ok Cathy?” asked Tonks, sprawled on the floor now surrounded by a bewildering array of jars and vials.

“I...” she began staring at herself in confusion, “yeah...just poked myself in the eye...”

Kaitlyn Potter she asked herself, raising an interested eyebrow, was she displaying the most obvious Freudian slip known to man? Was she really choosing her new name to make sure it matched Potter?

Of course you are, whispered a voice in her head, perhaps it was Kaitlyn. You know, deep down that Harry is your soul mate, that you're going to spend the rest of your lives together - why not Kaitlyn Potter?

And how long is the rest of your lives going to be, whispered a darker voice, the vestiges of the old, discarded Cathy. Harry could die tonight, tomorrow, this month or next year. So could you. This isn't a fun make-over, this is trying to hide yourself from a psychopathic killer and murderous cult.



Even so, said the stronger voice in her head, she'd rather die Kaitlyn Potter than Catherine Earl.

"Penny for your thoughts Cathy?" asked Tonks, who seemed to have been watching her silent, internal debate.

"It's Kaitlyn," she said quietly.

"Huh?"

"My name, it's Kaitlyn, now. But you can call me Kitty, you know," she said, turning to Tonks.

A broad smile crossed over Tonks' face, "Kaitlyn? I like it. Well Kaitlyn, Kitty, ready for my lotions and potions?"

"Sure," she smiled, lowering herself to the floor next to Tonks and trying to banish the image of her neatly carved gravestone from her mind.

"Now this," said Tonks holding up a green glass jar, "is a very good concealment lotion. Just use it like a moisturiser and it'll make your appearance forgettable to people. So the more they try and recollect your face, the harder it will be on them. It's a very tricky long-lasting disillusionment charm, extremely expensive. Luckily, I get all my goodies free from the Ministry as it's for business use - mostly."

She gave Kitty a wink.

"Then we've got some purification perfume, one spray of this and anyone within your immediate vicinity under their own disillusionment charms will smell like old cheese."

Kitty wrinkled her nose and gave the vial an experimental sniff.

"Luckily, for you it will smell like a rather nice floral perfumey type thing," grinned Tonks.

Kitty was about to spray some on her wrists her Tonks grabbed her hand with a warning look.

“Wouldn’t right now if I was you, I’ve got a massive spot on my chin I’ve got hidden from Remus at the moment and we’ll spend the next half an hour breathing in sweaty edam.”

Kitty merely laughed but stowed the perfume into the small bag Tonks had handed her. Next came various normal looking make-up items which each had odd extra additions and tingled, flashed and heated up when various things happened around her. The rate she was going, the next time someone sneaky approached her she’d drop down in a twitchy, flashing, sparkling heap of floral madness.

However, there were other non-make-up things she was given that she could see a very good use for. There was a small locket which would magically transport her to a predestined place when she opened it and pressed the photo within. She particularly liked the spray which would wipe 5 minutes of someone’s memory. She laughed quietly to herself, wondering if Tonks would understand a James Bond reference as she had become her own personal Q, complete with ludicrous inventions.

“Won’t your work notice all this stuff has gone?” asked Kitty.

“They don’t mind too much - necessary see? Most of this stuff is wand-replacement magic anyway.”

“What’s that?”

“Well basically, if you’re good enough, you should be able to do all of these with your wand, these are just back-ups for Aurors who get in trouble,” explained Tonks, inspecting another vial, “you’ll be surprised but the bods down in Experimental Magic have come up with a huge number of ways for muggles to do magic.”

“I can do magic?” gasped Kitty, excitement suddenly flooding her veins.

“Well, not technically. What you can do is release magic stored in certain objects by wizards, or use readymade potions. It’s not doing magic per se, it’s really releasing it in controlled ways. But it gets so cumbersome and clunky to have all these trinkets and oddments on your person that most muggles in magical families give up after a while.”

“It’s better than nothing though,” said Kitty, relishing the thought of being able to do certain things, as if by magic.

Tonks nodded and after imparting a few more items held up a small gold bracelet with a translucent crystal held in the centre. It glowed faintly as if lit by some inner light.

“This is the most important thing I’m going to give you,” she told Kitty carefully, “this is your emergency whistle right? If you get in trouble or feel in danger in any way, raise the bracelet to your lips and speak into the crystal. Someone will hear it and come to you.”

“It’s like a walkie talkie?” asked Kitty as she fixed it onto her wrist.

Tonks gave her a blank look.

“A telephone?” tried Kitty again.

“Yeah, sort of,” she replied in relief, “basically, it’s a method of communication we use in the Auror Department and now the Order. If you want to talk to someone specific, say their name first. If you just want anyone and quick, just start talking. Go on, try it out.”

Kitty raised her wrist to her lips, put pressure on either side of the crystal like Tonks showed her and cleared her throat, “Tonks? Testing, testing 1 2 3?”

At a split second delay, Kitty could hear her voice echoing around the room like reverb on a phone, “Tonks? Testing, testing 1 2 3?”

“That’s fantastic!” exclaimed Kitty, “How does it work, the crystal right?”

“Crystal’s got nothing to do with it, nor the bracelet. See my wrist, nothing there at all? It’s basically a spell on the wrist, but for muggles, the vehicle is the bracelet. We found that for people not used to magic, it makes more sense if you’ve got something to focus it on. An invisible spells not very tangible, but a magic crystal, that we can believe in!”

“Makes me feel a lot safer,” agreed Kitty, looking up at Tonks, “anything else?”

“The rest are just spells I’ll put on you myself when we move.”

“Any idea when that’ll be?”

“I’ve got my sights set on somewhere, won’t jinx it by telling you about it now, but fingers crossed the next few days,” said Tonks, looking pleased with herself. “Anyway, enough of all this stealth and secrecy, what do you think of your new look?”

They both clambered to their feet and regarded Kitty in the mirror.

“I love it, just wish my clothes matched me now,” she said, looking at her overly baggy jeans and old tee-shirt.

She suddenly felt as if she’d been wearing the same clothes for months, life on the road and living out of one rucksack didn’t give much chance for a great wardrobe selection. However, Tonks soon put that right, flicking the wand and altering the jeans to normal bootleg cut ones, changing the shirt into a new red top that matched her hair well.

“We’ll go shopping once we’re moved,” promised Tonks, surveying the result.

Kitty stared at herself again, wondering if she’d ever get used to the new look. It was odd to be staring into familiar eyes, surrounded by unfamiliar facial features, hairstyles, clothes, even accessories...

“It’s funny,” she began in a faraway voice, wondering if she could even articulate what she felt, “I’ve spent my whole life trying to look different, be different to everyone else and have all the attention...But now I want nothing more than to fit in, be unremarkable and hide away.”

Tonks regarded her for a moment, “You’ve chosen a difficult path Cathy, but I understand. I told Remus once, I think one of the reasons I love being a Metamorphmagus so much is that you can be different even when everyone around you is already weird, that you get all the attention for being something maybe you’re not deep down. But I can play the game, silly clumsy Tonks right? Can’t be taken too seriously because she dresses too trendy or wears her hair a few shades too bright.”

“Everyone puts on a mask,” she said, looking at her own reflection thoughtfully, “everyone. You’ve just decided to change yours.”

Kitty nodded, the different face in the mirror was a constant surprise, but somehow she felt more comfortable in it. Maybe she’d outgrown that other mask anyway. She certainly felt like she had since she met Harry.

Suddenly dreadlocks, piercings and tattoos seemed so...pointless.

“Harry has a mask,” she said out loud, surprising herself as much as Tonks, “it’s a good one too. I’ve seen right through the one he’s got for you lot, for the world. But he’s got one for me too. I sometimes think I catch glimpses of it, sometimes when he gets this look in his eyes...”

She trailed off and Tonks swung around so she was facing Kitty herself now and not her reflection.

“Don’t take it to heart Cathy,” she said softly, “it’s not a reflection against you, or how he feels about you. Everyone has them and Harry, well he’s got so much going on up in that head of his I’m just glad he’s got you to keep him sane.”

She nodded heavily. She remembered all those nights watching Harry have his nightmares, the guilt over Sirius, the fear he held inside him about the prophecy. Tonks was right, there was so much going on in that head of his, maybe that was why they'd been drawn together. Maybe he needed her more than she realised.

"I hate the thought of him leaving me," she murmured, thinking of tomorrow's final day together.

"He's not leaving you," said Tonks, "he's just leaving here."

"But I'm supposed to be there for him," she said, sounding almost childish and whiney, "you said it yourself I'm helping him...what if, without me, he's worse."

"You'll be able to talk Cathy, I promise. You've both got to be strong and be open. When all you can do is talk, there's no time to hide things, to be cagey or untruthful. Because if you can't be open and communicate, the distance is going to break you."

"Nothing can break us," whispered Kitty firmly, almost to herself.

"You can," Tonks suggested, "Harry can. Not even if you want to, it's self-sabotage."

Kitty felt angered by Tonks words but kept it in check, knowing she was trying to provide good counsel but feeling that she was letting her own personal life get in the way.

"We're talking about me and Harry," Kitty said, lifting her chin in defiance, "not you and Remus."

"I - what?" asked Tonks blankly.

"I'm guessing by the looks you've been giving each other and the way you've been acting today that something's happened?" Kitty told her, dropping back onto the stool, "all that talk about people's masks? Is that a thinly veiled comparison to Remus?"

“Well, like I said, everyone’s got a mask, especially Remus,” she muttered, turning away to pack up her scattered items now.

“He’s not letting you in?” guess Kitty, helping her with more of the pots.

“We’re fine,” Tonks told her, before meeting Kitty’s eyes and sighing.

She dropped back off her knees and gave Kitty a dull shrug, “I just get the feeling that he’s already pushing me away...like he’s enjoying the moment but there’s no longevity to it, you know?”

“Maybe he’s worried about being a werewolf?” said Kitty.

“He knows I don’t care about that,” she stated flatly.

“Or too old?”

Tonks gave her an annoyed look.

“Hey I don’t think so,” protested Kitty, “I’m just saying he might think that!”

“Doesn’t matter anyway, I don’t really feel like talking about it just yet. It might just be in my head, I want to wait and see before I start really worrying,” said Tonks, straightening up with the vanity case and shrinking it into her pocket, “Now, let’s go and set up shop in the living room? Show off your new look?”

Kitty shot her a thoughtful look before nodding and collecting her new bag of tricks. A quick glance at her watch told her it was now 11pm and Harry still hadn't returned.

She tried not to worry about this but failed miserably.

AN/ No good excuse for the massive delay but i'm hoping to roll out the final chapter in the next few weeks and an epilogue of your choice! Hope you like!

## Chapter Thirty One

### The Promise

Cursed since your birth dear  
And your worst fears have all come true  
Baby you're not the first here on earth clear  
Cause I'm still here and I'm cursed too  
Cursed like you

Harry and Dumbledore were walking down a hill, mist swirling about them as he clasped his cloak tighter to him to ward off the chill. It was late into the night and he had just had the oddest encounter he'd experienced for a long while. Harry was still trying to marshal his thoughts when Dumbledore spoke.

"Well done Harry," he said.

"I didn't do anything," said Harry in surprise.

"Oh yes you did. You showed Horace exactly how much he stands to gain by returning to Hogwarts. Do you like him?"

"Er..."

Harry thought back to the larger than life character they'd left behind in the old ladies home. He wasn't sure whether he had liked Horace Slughorn or not. He supposed he had been pleasant in his way, but he had also seemed vain, and whatever he said to contrary, much too surprised that a muggle born should make a good witch. He remembered the man's reaction to what Harry had told him about Hermione with a slight frown.

"Horace," said Dumbledore, relieving Harry of the responsibility to say any of this, "likes his comfort. He also likes the company of the famous, the successful and the powerful. He enjoys the feeling that he influences these people. He has never wanted to occupy the throne himself; he prefers the back seat - more room to spread out, you see."



Harry had a sudden and vivid mental image of a great swollen spider spinning a web around him, twitching a thread here and there to bring large and juicy flies a little closer.

“I tell you all this,” Dumbledore continued, “not to turn you against Horace - or as we must now call him, Professor Slughorn - but to put you on your guard. He will undoubtedly try and collect you, Harry. You would be the jewel of his collection, the Boy Who Lived...or, as they call you these days, the Chosen One.”

At these words, a chill that had nothing to do with the surrounding mist stole over Harry. He was reminded of words he had heard months ago, words that had a horrible and particular meaning to him:

Neither can live while the other survives.

Dumbledore had stopped walking, level with a church they had passed on the trip towards Horace Slughorn's hideaway

“This will do, Harry. If you will grasp my arm.”

Braced this time, Harry was ready for the sudden suffocating feeling of apparation, but still found it unpleasant. When the pressure disappeared and he found himself able to breathe again, he found himself standing in the overgrown park flanking the front of 12 Grimmauld Place.

“Before we enter Harry, I must tell you that it is my wish that you take private lessons with me this year.”

“Private - with you?” said Harry, surprised at the sudden introduction of the topic.

“Yes, I think it's time I took a greater hand in your education.”

“What will you be teaching me, Sir?”

“Oh a little of this, a little of that,” said Dumbledore airily.

Harry waited hopefully, but Dumbledore did not elaborate.

“Sir,” said Harry tentatively, “does what you’re going to teach me have anything to do with the prophecy? Will it help me ... survive?”

“It has a very great deal to do with the prophecy,” said Dumbledore, as casually as if Harry had asked him about the next day’s weather, “and I certainly hope that it will help you to survive.”

“Right...” he said, letting out the unsteady breath he hadn’t been aware of holding.

His eyes drifted back to Grimmauld Place and he asked something else that had been creeping about in his mind since setting eyes on the house.

“Sir, is everything going to be alright, for Kitty?”

“Tonks has been working very hard in securing her protection,” Dumbledore said gently, pushing the creaking gate to the park open and leading Harry to the front door, “she will have the best protection we can afford her, and if I may say so, she has an uncanny knack for survival herself. You’re quite well suited in that way.”

Harry blushed slightly and looked away as Dumbledore rapped on the door.

It was Bill who opened the door, ushering them both in quickly and shutting the door tightly. He muttered something to Dumbledore, who turned to Harry with a paternal smile.

“No rest for the wicked,” he said, motioning to the kitchen where Harry guessed a meeting was forming.

Harry glanced at the ugly grandfather clock propped in an alcove - it was nearly 11.30 already, late meeting indeed. He wondered whether Kitty was in bed yet, before scoffing at his own thought - Kitty have an early night?

“Well, see you at Hogwarts, sir,” said Harry.

“Yes. Thank you Harry,” he said, momentarily resting a hand on his shoulder before sweeping down the corridor.

Harry climbed the stairs quickly and knocked on the door to the girls room. Hermione’s voice called for him to enter and he stuck his head around the door.

“Harry!” she said in relief, “I’m so glad you’re back safe - where did you go?”

“Dumbledore had me helping recruit the new Defence teacher,” he explained, causing her eyes to light up in interest.

Harry swept his gaze across the room as she questioned him. Both her and Ginny were already in pyjamas and in their beds, obviously they’d been chatting over the candlelight. Oddly, Kitty’s camp bed lay empty and undisturbed. When he thought he’d been polite long enough he motioned to the camp bed.

“Seen Kitty?”

“Haven’t seen her for a while,” shrugged Hermione, “she was with Tonks in the library earlier.”

“Oh right,” he said frowning, already turning to leave “night guys.”

“Night Harry,” called Hermione and Ginny in unison.

Harry climbed to the next floor. The library must have been exterminated since he’d last visited because it had always been out of bounds before. He remembered Sirius nursing a particularly bad book bite and scowling as he recounted the literary ambush. When he reached the door he found it slightly ajar, firelight flickering through the cracks. He pushed it open and poked his head in.

He felt his spirits sink slightly as he saw Kitty wasn't in there, the only occupant was Tonks, who was sat on a sofa, head turned away from him as she flicked restlessly through a book.

"Hey Tonks," he said, voice sounding loud in the quiet room, "seen Kitty?"

She jumped when he spoke and looked around, brown hair swishing across her face.

"Yeah," she laughed.

"Where?" he asked impatiently, distracted slightly by a large ugly statue of a haughty wizard propped up against the wall scowling at him and muttering.

Tonks climbed to her feet and turned to Harry, spreading her arms wide, "Here."

"Wh-" he began before his voice died in his throat.

It wasn't Tonks after all, the voice should have given it away. He merely stared at Kitty for a moment, who raised a self-conscious hand to her shorter, sleeker hair.

"Well," she asked nervously when he didn't speak, giving a twirl to show off her new clothes, "what do you think?"

Harry shook his head slightly and walked over to her as she gave another spin, new hair flicking across her face as she came to a halt. He felt an irresistible urge to run his fingers through the shiny hair and found moments later that his hand was already doing it.

"Wow," he said stupidly, "you look..."

"Different?" she asked worriedly, bright blue eyes pleading.

He was momentarily distracted by them - had they always been that blue or had she changed that too? Then he realised she didn't have

those dark black rings painted around her eyes. It made her look younger and, he thought with a silent snigger, more innocent.

“You don’t like it,” she stated, pouting and making her sudden youthful look even more obvious.

“I...I love it,” he said, shaking his head and returning to the here and now, “I’m just surprised, you look so different.”

“Weird huh?” she laughed, looking relieved at his words, “I’m still trying to get used to it.”

He agreed, stepping closer and studying her intently in the firelight. He ran his fingers through her hair again - on closer inspection it was brown with flecks of red and gold, Gryffindor colours. He grinned to himself, before noticing the piercings had gone and ran a thumb across the spots they’d vacated. It was odd, it was definitely Kitty staring back at him, but not at the same time.

“You look...so different,” he murmured, hands sliding to her neck and tilting her face up to his.

“Still me though,” she promised.

He grinned slightly, before leaning down and sharing a long slow kiss. He couldn’t help running his fingers through her hair at the same time and she grinned into the kiss, moulding her body against his.

“Yep, definitely still the same you,” he agreed as they broke apart briefly.

She merely laughed and leaned forward, catching his lips with another kiss. He held onto her tightly, relishing the closeness they both knew would soon be denied them. After what seemed like hours Harry gave her a little push so they were stumbling backwards towards the sofa, laughing and whispering to each other. As the back of her legs hit the edge of the sofa, both he and Kitty fell back onto it.

“Why Mr Potter,” she breathed jokingly, looking up at him, blue eyes glittering, “is this entirely appropriate?”

“Not at all,” he grinned, straddled over her as he looked down at her, heart hammering pleasantly.

“Just so we know where we stand,” she laughed, leaning up to catch his kiss and pulling him down on top of her.

Harry’s mind went strangely blank of all thought, focussed on nothing but Kitty, right there and then. He felt her hands trailing across his back and his own pressed against her warm body.

“Hem hem.”

The alien voice startled both of them, not least Harry because a sudden toad face flashed across his mind and with a yelp he tumbled off Kitty and onto the floor. Scrambling to his feet he looked over to the door to see Ron, shadowing the doorway awkwardly.

“Ron!? What the hell was that for?” gasped Harry, cheeks flaming as he caught sight of Kitty hastily tidying her shirt and new hair.

“Mum’s on the way up,” Ron told him urgently.

No sooner had he said this than Mrs Weasley appeared behind Ron, eyes narrowed in motherly suspicion.

“Time for bed, all of you,” she snapped, holding the door open for them, “off you go Cathy.”

Kitty, who had sat up and given the appearance of nothing untoward happening in record time, climbed to her feet and smiled her goodbye’s to everyone. Harry felt her fingers brush his as she walked past him.

“On you go Ron,” Mrs Weasley flapped and Harry felt his stomach drop - he was trapped alone with her now.

“Is the meeting over already Mrs Weasley?” Harry asked in an attempt to appear normal.

“Yes it is Harry,” she said, nostrils flaring for a moment as she seemed to consider her options, “don’t let me catch you sneaking off again.”

“I wasn’t,” he replied instantly, “I was...looking for a book.”

Mrs Weasley merely raised a suggestive eyebrow.

“Sorry Mrs Weasley,” he said quietly, studying his shoes intently.

“I’d have expected better of you Harry,” she said firmly, holding the door open, “off to bed with you now.”

“G’night,” he mumbled, hurrying out of the library, cheeks still aflame.

It was worth it though, said a rebellious voice in his head.

Definitely.

Kitty was crouched in front of a rain soaked grave stone, fingers tearing into the dirt in front of it as she dug a small hollow. Into it she was stuffing clumps of hair and other various items which clinked metallically. The more she put in, the lighter she became until she was floating high above the graveyard.

Just then Tonks’ voice suddenly issued from her wrist, begging her to come down, pleading for help. Suddenly she was falling, landing with a sickening crunch back on the floor of the graveyard.

But this time the shapes were indistinct and blurred at edges, now the scene in front of her was in glorious Technicolor and surround sound. A certainty entered her mind that before she was dreaming and now she was somewhere else, somewhere more...real.

She looked up to see cracked headstones all around and only had a moment to take in the names before rough hands grabbed her from behind and she was dragged kicking and screaming into the nearby church. In an odd flicker suddenly she was lying on the floor on the church, man straddled across her stomach.

She couldn't see his face, it was hidden by the now familiar mask, but he was gripping her wrists roughly and she could smell his stale breath on her face. She was yelling and shouting, but couldn't make out the words, only feel the very real, familiar, terror in her heart. Suddenly, the scene switched again and she was back outside in the graveyard, crouched down in the wet grass.

There was a hoarse yell ahead of her and she turned to see Harry being thrown through the air, as if by magic, watched by the tall, skeletal Tom Riddle. Again the screams from herself seemed lost in air, only the sound of Harry crying out and the cold laughter of the surrounding spectators filling her mind.

Again and again Harry fell until he lay still, breath rattling in his throat as she looked into his bloodied eyes, screaming for him to get up. The image shifted again and her head reeled as she relived what seemed like a random chain of events; fighting against a cloaked man in the grass, dodging graves as she ran to the church, explosions of light all around her. Building dread gathered in her stomach as she reached the church and saw the vicar, waking brain catching up with the slumbering subconscious.

Not the vicar.

She tried to shout her warning, the same she'd shouted all those weeks ago. But again he didn't reply, and again the cloaked figures surrounded him. She was fighting against the nightmare now, trying to will herself to wake up before-

There was a flash of green light and a dull thump ahead of her.

She looked up to see the dead man's eyes staring at her accusingly.

But it wasn't the vicar this time, it was Harry.



Kitty screamed.

She lashed out, struggling wildly against whatever was binding her arms to her sides, screaming and yelling for help.

“Cathy!” cried a voice.

“Get off me! GET OFF ME!” Kitty screamed even louder, wrenching at her bindings, before toppling off something suddenly and hitting a wooden floor.

“Cathy, it’s me! Hermione!” the voice said urgently, “You’re just having a nightmare - you’re ok now!”

Something of the authoritative voice must have worked on her because Kitty lessened her thrashing, pulling at her quilt covers now and trying to scramble to her feet. She was taking deep, shuddering breaths, trying to steady her nerves and rid her vision of those dead, green eyes.

“Cathy? You ok?” asked Hermione in a calming voice, “Should I get someone?”

“N - no” Kitty stammered, clambering to her feet unsteadily, “I’m fine.”

“Are you sure?” asked Ginny, looking pale-faced in the candlelight that had magically appeared.

“I’m fine...” Kitty told them, already gathering her old jumper and pulling it on.

The worn fluffy inside instantly began to work against the violent goosebumps that had arisen. All she wanted to do now was get away from the girls, go somewhere to think, make sure Harry was ok.

“Just need water...” she told them, staggering towards the door and out into the corridor.

Grimmauld Place at night was a million times spookier than it was during the day and Kitty crept down the stairs quietly, trying to ignore the odd shrunken heads that adorned the walls. She was still shaking from her nightmares and tried to pull her hooded top around her tighter to ward off the chill.

It was so dark she was re-tracing her steps to the bathroom almost from memory. She finally found it, creeping in and leaning heavily against the sink for a moment. She looked into her reflection - she looked pale and sickly in the greenish glow that came from another of those magically lighting candles.

After a moment she turned the tap on with a shaking hand and bent down to drink greedily from the cool dribble of water, turning the nightmare over again in her mind. It was more reliving a memory, she told herself, it was the night in the graveyard again, the same set of events she dreamed most nights.

But she'd never seen Harry dead before.

"You're just worried," she whispered at her reflection, trying to believe herself, "that's all...Harry's fine...he's going to be fine."

She stared at herself for a long moment, aware of the lack of conviction in her voice. Tears began to gather in her eyes and after a moment of trying to fight against them, she let them come. She screwed her eyes up, gripping tightly to the edge of the sink as the salty tears splashed down onto chipped porcelain.

"We're going to b-be fine..." she sobbed to herself, furiously scrubbing her face with the cuff of her jumper.

Just fine.

Harry wasn't sleeping well. He kept waking up from scrambled dreams, tossing and turning to get comfy again before slipping back into unconsciousness. One such time of trying to find a comfy spot on

the ancient mattress he heard the door to his and Ron's room creek open quietly.

He reached for his wand unconsciously, propping himself up on his elbow to survey the dark shape in the doorway.

"You awake Harry?" the whispered was so low he hardly heard it.

"Hermione?" he asked in an equally low voice, "What's wrong?"

"Cathy had a nightmare and she's been gone for ages and I – well, I thought she might be with you..."

Harry quickly and silently crawled out of bed and crept over to the door, sliding through and closing it with a click. Hermione was bundled up in a red dressing gown, bushy hair dishevelled with sleep and an anxious expression plastered across her face.

"She had a nightmare?" he demanded quietly.

"Yeah, she woke up screaming and shouting about half an hour ago," she told him, "she went to get a glass of water but hasn't come back."

"Right," Harry said, looking down the dark corridors, "I'll go find her."

"But-"

"Thanks for telling me Hermione, she'll be back in a bit," he promised, already making his way back into the bedroom and feeling around for his own dressing gown.

He heard Hermione give a sigh and wander back, presumably, to her own room.

He dislodged the bag of items he'd bought from Diagon Alley that day and heard a dull thud of something falling out of the bag onto the wooden floor. Bending down and feeling around in the dark, his

fingers closed around a small box. He gave a smile of recognition at his most recent purchase and slipped it into his pocket.

Moving back into the hall and closing the door with a click, he lit his wand and decided to start at the top and work his way down, knowing Kitty she'd gone somewhere to gather herself and think. He was about to climb the stairs to the next level up when he remembered finding her in the library earlier. He had thought it was an odd choice of hideaway for her but then remembered the big fire and comfy sofas - and solitude.

He stepped back off the step and wandered down to the end of the long, twisting corridor. Sure enough, a chink of reddish light marked the doorway to the library. Lowering his wand and pushing the door open slowly, he entered the library, looking around for her. At first glance the room seemed to be empty, but as he rounded the sofa he found her stretched out on the sofa, hugging a pillow to her chest.

Her eyes were rimmed red.

Harry sat down on the sofa and looked down at her wordlessly, reached out and tucking her new fringe behind her ear. After a long minute of silence, Kitty gave a sniff.

"I keep dreaming about the graveyard," she told him, eyes never straying from the dancing flames of the fire.

Harry nodded heavily.

"Me too."

"Its ok, usually, I just accept that it happened, you know?" she said, voice sounding gravelly.

"What was different this time?" he said, impressed at her apparently practical view of the situation.

She gave a heavy sigh and turned slightly to look up at him, "You died this time."

Harry tried to stop the hitch of breath and repeated the motion with her hair.

“I’m fine,” he told her, “it was just a nightmare.”

“This time you were just fine!” she said in a thick voice, “But what about next time?”

“I’ll be fine,” he repeated, hoping he sounded more convincing than he felt.

Kitty didn’t say anything, instead she looked away quickly, back to the fire and with a sigh Harry watched her shaking shoulders. Wordlessly he gathered her into a hug and she clung onto him tightly, burying her head into his shoulder.

“We’re going to make it, you know,” he told her quietly.

“How do you know?” she cried, voice thick with tears.

Harry was silent for a moment.

“Because Dumbledore said so,” he replied finally, wondering if Kitty could understand this.

She didn’t reply, and stared into the dancing flames for so long that Harry thought perhaps she had forgotten him entirely. Silent tears were still sliding down her cheeks and Harry had a sudden memory of a time before all this began, back when she’d been so strong that the first time he’d seen her cry he’d thought she was laughing. Once again the thought that he’d broken her returned – what had happened to that strong, fierce Kitty?

“Do you really believe Dumbledore though?” she asked with some difficulty, as if merely saying it would jinx them.

Harry frowned and in a sudden moment took hold of her shoulder and rolled her back so she lay flat on the sofa. He stared at her, trying to

decide what to say. She'd given him a look of surprise but didn't say a word and merely waited.

"Maybe not," he said finally, "but if I die then at least it'll be for something I believe in."

The short tone of his voice must have stirred something because in a sudden movement of her own she pushed herself up onto her elbows. She regarded him with reddened eyes.

"And you're ok with that?" she demanded harshly, "dying?"

"Of course not!" he scoffed, "I'm terrified. But I'd rather die on my feet than live my life on my knees."

Again, her stare went on for far too long. Harry wondered for a moment whether she'd developed some kind of psychic powers - she seemed to be trying to read his mind through the intensity of the stares. He thought that if ever she could do magic, she'd be a fantastic legillimens.

"I know you would," she said finally, "That's one of the things I love about you Harry. But please don't do anything stupid. Don't leave me. Don't forget that you're got an incredibly selfish girlfriend waiting for you to come back."

"You're not selfish," he said, stomach growing cold at her heartfelt plea.

"Of course I am," she told him with a watery smile, "I'd give anything for us to be in Cornwall now, in our tent, surfing and having barbeques – like we planned. I hate having to share you with anyone. I don't care about anyone or anything but you."

Harry gave her a lopsided grin. He'd never convince her he was going to make it; he couldn't even convince himself. But he knew that if, somehow, they made it out of the war, she'd be there waiting.

He picked up her hands, threading his fingers in with hers.

“Do you know, before I met you I used to think, deep down in my heart, that it wouldn’t be so bad to die. I thought, it’d be like going home, and I’d see my mum and dad, see Sirius...”

Kitty breath hitched slightly and her eyes widened in alarm.

“But then,” he insisted, shuffling towards her, “I happened to catch the same bus as this amazingly strong, funny and beautiful girl-”

“-Harry-” she interjected, blushing.

“-Amazingly strong, funny and beautiful girl,” he continued regardless, “and I fell in love with her. And I just knew I’d spend the rest of my life with, no matter how long or short that was going to be.”

“And now, do you know what? I’m terrified of dying...because then I wouldn’t get to do all those things with you that I’d planned.”

“What like?” she asked breathlessly.

“Normal things, like Cornwall,” he laughed, “like finding a place for us to live...like never having to be apart...like waking up together every morning...”

She laughed and bashfully lowered her gaze for a moment, cheeks tinged with pink. The sight of an embarrassed Kitty was so novel that he couldn’t help but laugh happily.

“I’ll make it Kitty – we’ll make it.”

“There will be a future,” she whispered, almost to herself.

“What’s that?”

“It’s what I kept telling myself that night in the graveyard. I was dragging you through that wood thinking there would be a future. I kept telling myself we had a future, that this couldn’t be it, a horrible

end to a shitty life. That I'd have a future with you, that we'd see the sun rising the next day, that we'd be safe."

"And we will be," Harry told her seriously, face pale at her words, "there will be a future."

He leant down and planted a kiss on her lips, fingers already weaving into her unfamiliar, straightened hair. The kiss had a bittersweet quality, tinged with salty tears but full of the promise of many more years to come. When they broke apart, Kitty merely leaned her forehead against his and there they sat, for how long he didn't know.

And in the briefest of moments, he made a massive decision, a life changing one. His heart was hammering against his ribs as he watched her.

"I've got something to ask you," he said in a low voice.

She pulled her eyes open and gazed into his, only centimetres away, bright green against vivid blue.

"What?" she asked.

"Well actually I've got something I want to give you...to prove that I'm serious when I tell you there will be a future."

"What?" she repeated, puzzled frown crossing her features.

Harry pulled away from her and plunged his hand into his dressing gown pocket. In one sudden motion he pulled a small box out and moved off the sofa, sinking to his knees in front of her.

"Harry, what-

"Kitty. You know that I can't make you any promises, but if it were up to me, you know I'd promise to be with you forever, until we were old and wrinkly-

"Harry..."



“Don’t interrupt!” he laughed, as she gaped between him and the box in his hands in front of her.

“But what I can promise you is that I will love you forever. And I can promise that I want to be with you for the rest of my life, no matter how long or short that’s going to be. So...will you marry me?”

Kitty seemed absolutely lost for words and all Harry could do was hold open the box and stare at her, holding his breath with what seemed the entire world as he waited for her answer. He knew that this moment was the most important in his whole life, he could hardly think straight.

“Kitty...” he prompted in a whisper when she hadn’t replied.

She hadn’t taken her eyes off the box since he’d produced it and Harry found that as ever her expression was unreadable. What it shock, fear, happiness? As she raised her eyes to his the horrible unthinkable thought struck him, that she’d say no, that his request was completely ludicrous.

“Kitty – I know it’s not much of an offer,” the words came tumbling out of his mouth before he knew what he was saying, “but I love you, more than anything and-”

“Yes.”

He almost didn’t hear her, lost in his own maddened world of fear and anxiety as he tried to convince her. But something must have registered because suddenly the world was holding its breath again and everything was silent.

“What?” he asked, daring not to believe.

“I’d said yes!” she exclaimed suddenly, dropping down off the sofa onto her knees in front of him, “more than anything in the world! Yes!”

The world sighed and Harry thought suddenly he'd burst with happiness. Vaguely aware they were both laughing wildly he pulled the small, gold band out of box and took the hand Kitty offered. It slipped down and nestled against her white skin, gleaming in the firelight. She stared at it a moment before throwing her arms around his neck and embracing him tightly.

"Did you ever think I'd say no?" she demanded ecstatically.

Harry didn't answer, he thought the relief coursing through his veins prevented any coherent speech at all. He was saved the trouble of having to reply however when she pulled out of the embrace and leant forward and kissed him.

He lost himself in it, feeling somehow that now everything would be ok; suddenly the war, his destiny, their future didn't seem that big or scary. Because he knew she'd always be there for him. He deepened the kiss and she ran her hands down his back and under his shirt, pulling him closer.

Her body moulded against his as he ran his fingers through her hair, kissing her more and more intensely until he began to feel light headed and she broke away with a gasp. Her eyes were oddly unfocussed and her cheeks were flushed and red. The image of her sitting there breathless was one he knew he'd recall forever more when he thought about her.

Silently she pulled him back to her and kissed him once more.

"I love you Harry," she murmured into his lips desperately.

As one, they pulled each other back onto the sofa and Harry found himself straddling over her, her new brown and gold hair fanned out across the cushion, seemingly dancing in the firelight.

"I love you too."

The voice hardly sounded like his and he realised as he bent don't to kiss her once more, he'd never believed in anything more deeply than that in his whole life.

The pale white light of dawn approaching was already highlighting the dust motes in the air in the library as Harry awoke groggily. At first he was unaware of what had caused him to awake but then he heard the birds beginning to sing and he gave a shiver of cold.

He peeled his eyes open and found his vision was completely blocked by Kitty's sleeping face. She was stretched out alongside the length of him, her legs entwined with his. He watched her sleep for some time, taking in every detail of her face, from the faint scar of unknown origin he noticed on her forehead, to the faint curve of her lips into a curious grin.

He was finding it difficult to believe that he had asked her to marry him, at only 16 years old, and not only that but she had yes and here they were. The future Mr and Mrs Potter. He guessed the reason he hadn't thought about it, and had bought the ring on a whim and proposed unexpectedly, was that it didn't seem odd. It seemed like the perfect thing to do, the only thing he could do.

He wondered if his dad had been so certain when he proposed to his mother and quickly decided he must have been. The thought made him happy and made his desire to see his father and speak to him return all the more stronger. But now he felt like for the first time, that his parents could wait, he had a whole, long life to live first.

With Kitty.

Unconsciously, he reached out and brushed her new fringe out of her face, trailing his fingers down her face, determined to remember not only what she looked like, but how she felt too. Her eyes moved slightly beneath her lids and after a moment she gave a slight murmur and moved her cheek into Harry's hand.

Sleeping eyes opened and focussed upon Harry's.

"Morning," he said quietly.

Harry watched as she recognised him and gave a long smile, pecking him on the lips before settling back down.

“Sleep well?” she murmured teasingly.

He gave a grin, slipping his arm around her bare waist in answer. She gave him a cheeky grin and after a moment, reached around and took hold of the offending arm, twining her fingers in with his. The small gold ring shone out and she studied it for some time.

“When d’you get it?” she asked him.

“Yesterday. I saw it in the window as we walked past and convinced Ron he needed to go in and buy Hermione some nice jewellery for her birthday.”

Kitty smiled almost dreamily to herself and studied it intently, turning her hand this way and that as if admiring it from all angles. It was a plain gold band with no stone or engravings, but somehow it had spoken out to Harry when he’d caught sight of it. Before that moment the idea of marriage was a million miles away from him.

“You approve?” he guessed with a grin.

“It’s perfect,” she told him, giving him another quick kiss, “everything’s perfect now.”

Harry wrapped his arm back around her waist and pulled her on top of him. She gave a yelp of surprise before grinning bemusedly at him and bending down to exchange a long slow kiss.

“Why Mr Potter,” she exclaimed, slightly breathlessly when they finally pulled apart, “I do believe you’re becoming quite the best kisser in all of England.”

“Well future-Mrs Potter,” he retorted, “it takes one to know one.”

She pulled back, looking momentarily surprised.

“What?” he asked with a laugh.

“Nothing, I’ve just realised I’ll be a Mrs...makes me sound so old!” she gave a sudden burst of happy laughter, “Mrs Potter? Kitty Potter?”

“Sounds perfect to me,” he told her, “but I guess it won’t be for a few years yet.”

“Suppose not,” she said, face falling at the thought, “when do you think? When will all this be over?”

“Why don’t we say,” began Harry thoughtfully, “that we’ll get married exactly one year after the war finishes? Give us something to look forward to and time to decide where to go on our honeymoon.”

“Oh yeah, honeymoon too! But we already know where we’re going,” she told him, “Cornwall remember? You promised! Car, tent, barbeque and surfing. I’ll take nothing more or less.”

“Deal,” he laughed.

A sudden peal of arthritic sounding chimes issued from a dusty clock on the mantelpiece and Harry saw Kitty glance over to it.

“It’s 6am,” she informed him, “reckon we should get back to our rooms?”

“Better had, I don’t want another lecture from Mr Weasley about sneaking off,” he grumbled as Kitty sat up, dragging the blanket with her.

Harry shivered and Kitty threw his t-shirt to him, “Better get dressed then before she has a real reason to lecture you.”

She gave him a cheeky grin and Harry pulled it on, amusing himself with watching Kitty trying to pull her own t-shirt on whilst still trying to hold up the blanket.

“Why the sudden burst of modesty?” he teased, giving the blanket a sudden tug, “I’ve seen it all before you know.”

“Girls got to have some standards you know,” she retorted, faint blush on her cheeks.

Harry rolled his eyes and when Kitty finished, he got up off the sofa too, holding out his hand to hers before they walked to the door.

“You better go first,” he told her, “just in case anyone’s about. I’ll see you at breakfast?”

She nodded and he caught her lips with a brief, intense kiss before she slipped out the door. He sighed happily to himself and leant back against the door for a good five minutes before he followed suit. Ron was still fast asleep, snoring loudly when he got back to his room and jumped under the covers of his bed, thinking about nothing except Kitty.

A/N

Just a little chapter, hope you liked it! I realise how long its been since i updated and i'm very sorry - life ctaches up with you a little! I've nearly finished the last chapter and epilogue now, so it should only be a few weeks to the ending! If you've got something you want to see in this, or ideas - i'm always open to suggestion!

## Chapter Thirty Two

### Summers End

You touched my heart, you touched my soul  
You changed my life and all my goals  
I've kissed your lips and held your hand  
Shared your dreams and shared your bed  
I know you well, I know your smell  
I've been addicted to you

Goodbye my lover, Goodbye my friend  
You have been the one, You have been the one for me

Wormwood Scrubs, as even Remus knew, was an infamous muggle prison in London. Nothing to rival the scale and architecture of Azkaban perhaps, but impressive in its own permanent way. Not the usual place then, to be taken to for a day trip and he remarked as much to Tonks.

“I find it...reassuring,” she suggested, smiling across at it faintly, “nice to know they’re in there, and we’re out here!”

He thought back to her time spent as a sentinel at Azkaban and wondered whether she was getting sentimental for her old haunt. Then again, he reasoned as they skirted the impressively solid looking perimeter wall, he guessed Aurors had a different view on prisons to the general population. To them they were almost a trophy case, proudly displaying their successes.

“Anyway,” she said excitedly, “we’re not here to sightsee. We’re here to make a house call.”

“Who to?” he asked curiously, allowing her to lead him across the road now and away from the prison.

She merely tapped her nose secretively, before slipping her hand into his. They were walking for another five minutes, chatting away on inconsequential topics as Tonks’ excitement level rose. They entered

a bustling market square and had to raise voices against the shouts of the sellers, all hawking their wares.

“What’s the rush?” he asked, noticing she was practically skipping ahead now.

“We don’t want to be late, hurry up!” said Tonks impatiently, practically dragging Remus by the shirt sleeve towards the large multi-storey building on the other side of the square.

She paused dramatically, and with much arm waving and gusto proclaimed, “Da daaaa!”

Remus looked at the house feeling slightly unsure.

“What do you think?” she asked him anxiously when she noticed his doubtful expression.

“A block of flats?” he asked.

“Not just any old block of flats,” she said, waggling her finger at him and giving a booming guffaw, “Ho no! This is much more than that...”

She darted forwards excitedly and he had to practically jog to keep up as she moved towards the building. He finally caught up with her standing impatiently in the lobby.

“What are we doing here?” he laughed, her good mood infectious, “Visiting someone?”

“Yup,” she said with a wide grin, pulling him towards the lifts.

“Who?” he asked, but she merely laughed mysteriously.

Once the metal doors slid shut she pointed to the panel at the side which had a row of shiny brass buttons.

“Floor 13 please,” she said with a secret smile on her lips.



“Buildings never have a 13th floor,” he told her, rolling his eyes, “muggle superstition...”

He trailed off when his eyes caught a shiny brass 13 screwed in next to one of the buttons, sandwiched directly between floors 12 and 14.

“Oh,” he merely said, pressing it.

Tonks was practically bouncing around the cabin now, impossibly excited. Remus merely grinned at her before watching the flashing lights counting upwards.

“ Ten...eleven,” said Tonks with an excited squeal, “twelve...Thirteen!”

The lift slid to a halt and the doors opened with a friendly ping. Remus was greeted by a long corridor, decorated with a deep, plush blue carpet, wooden panels along the walls and paintings dotted along it at every few paces. They were magical; in fact a lot of them were pointing and waving at them. Tonks waved happily to one of them, before pointing down the corridor. There were a few doors on the floor, but -

the one they were heading to was made of heavy oak with a brass question mark screwed onto it. They both paused in front of it and she looked at him expectantly.

“Who lives here?” he asked her.

Tonks held up a key.

“Me!”

Remus stared at her in shock as she put the key in and turned the lock – sure enough the door swung open and Tonks did another drum roll.

“ Da daaaaa!” she proclaimed, jumping in and turning to him expectantly, “What do you think?”

“You got a place?” he said, sounding slightly dumbfounded, “Already?”

“I got a place!” she grinned, throwing her arms around his neck and giving him a quick kiss, “Come on, tell me what you think?”

She took his hand and led him from room to room. The first, the one they’d walked into was a small living room, complete with two sofas, a small television on a coffee table next to the obligatory fireplace. There was a large bookcase that was already half full of books, overshadowing Tonks’ guitar case, which was surrounded by various cardboard box’s that had her untidy scrawl across them with unintelligible commands such as Not in here and Odd things with no home.

“And look at the view,” she said, pulling him over to the window and pulling back one of the heavy blue curtains, “isn’t it breath-taking?”

He murmured with agreement, the view from the place was amazing, looking across the bustling market and down the twisting alleyways of the London suburb, prison looming on the horizon. The streets were thronged with muggles going about their daily lives, completely unaware that if they only looked up they could have glimpsed into a world of magic.

“And the kitchen,” she said suddenly, yanking him through an archway next to the bookcase.

They emerged into another small room, boasting all the muggle appliances as well as a few magical mod-cons. Next to the kitchen counter was a small breakfast table with three chairs set around it, all of which were covered in more boxes that had more slightly understandable labels such as Spoons and Mum’s crocks scrawled across them.

“What do you think?” she repeated anxiously.

“It’s very nice,” he nodded appreciatively, looking around the space that already seemed to possess Tonks’ personality.

She gave a huge grin, looking mightily pleased with herself.

“When did you find the time to move all this in?” he asked her in amazement, she’d hardly left Grimauld Place for days.

“A woman has her ways,” she said secretively, before giving another infectious laugh, “plus Bill and Charlie are easily susceptible to the old fluttering eyelashes.”

He grinned and gazed around the small kitchen once more.

“When do you move in?” he asked her, looking around at the boxes.

“Tomorrow. I’ll bring Kitty as soon as Harry and the others catch the Hogwarts Express,” she told him, “give her something to focus on.”

Remus nodded to himself before one of the boxes caught his eye.

“Just one question?” he said, moving over to the breakfast bar, “How is it possible to have a whole box full of spoons?”

He peered under the lid to see that indeed, it was a box of spoons of all different shapes and sizes. He looked across to her to see a sheepish look on her face and the beginning of a blush. He began to laugh and eventually she joined in as he began to sort through the collection.

“I collect them,” she said with a self-deprecating shrug, “mum said I’ve done it forever - don’t laugh!”

“I’m not laughing,” he said, tried to keep a straight face and failing miserably.

She poked her tongue out at him and looked in the box too, sorting through a few, “You’re right, it really is strange isn’t it?”

“Sign of a quirky personality,” he said and she smiled.

“Quirky eh?” she asked, wrapping her arms around his neck.

“Mmm hmm,” he agreed, placing his arms around her waist.

“Do we like quirky?” she asked him playfully.

“Oh, we love quirky,” he replied as she gave a chuckle, before leaning forwards and kissing him.

When they broke apart, Tonks grinned mischievously wrapping her arms around Remus tightly.

“You haven’t seen the best part yet,” she told him in a sing-song voice.

“What is it?”

“My bedroom,” she said innocently.

Remus gave a laugh and allowed Tonks to take his hand and pull him out of the kitchen. She weaved them both through the living room, manoeuvring around the boxes without tripping once. She reached the door and pushed it open, revealing a bare room with nothing in except a few boxes stacked up against one wall and a freshly made double bed.

She turned back to him and wrapped her arms back round his waist.

“What do you think?”

“I approve,” he laughed, “so does inner Remus.”

Tonks grinned and he caught her lips with a passionate kiss, culminating in him bodily lifting her up and dropping her on the bed. She reached up and pulled him down by the front of his robes, so that he was straddling over her, a decidedly un-Remus like expression on his face.

She stared at him for a moment, as if she couldn't quite believe that they were both there, together and happy.

"Do you know how long I've been waiting for this?" she told him in a low voice, "For us?"

He gave a twisted grin, "I never thought you'd look twice at me."

She gave a brief smile, "Ditto."

Remus didn't say anything more, but merely bent down and kissed her.

Grimmauld Place, like any other magical home in England on August 31st, was full of preparations for the coming school year. As the Weasley's would be taking Harry to Kings Cross and they had been attending Order meetings, they had been staying in the house over most of the summer. Now, the entire house was bowing to the will of Mrs Weasley as she discovered socks that needed darning, robes that needed altering and other such motherly tasks.

Harry and the others were quite happy to stay out of her way and contented themselves to sitting in the living room, enjoying each others company. He was sat on the sofa, Kitty lying against his chest as they watched Hermione and Ron once again warring, this time via the chessboard. Ginny was amusing Crookshanks by conjuring ribbons out of her wand and trailing them in front of the cats face.

A battered radio was sat in the corner, the warbling sounds of the singer contending with the crackling logs on the fire.

Harry had his arms wrapped around Kitty's stomach, fingers entwined with hers and they sat in silence. He couldn't help fiddling with the ring on her finger, as if by letting it go would suddenly risk Kitty's disappearance. They were both only too aware that this was the last day and that tomorrow they would be parted until probably Christmas.

“Pops told me I’ve been accepted by an art college in London,” she told him as Ron’s bishop mercilessly attacked Hermione’s pawn with his crook.

Harry grinned at her affectionate nickname for Dumbledore, “That’s fantastic! When do you start?”

“Monday,” she said in a faraway voice.

His heart gave another unpleasant lurch at another reminder of their impending split. He continued to play with her ring, thinking of the future.

“Tonks said she’s got us a place too,” Kitty told him, “we move in tomorrow. After your train.”

“Where is it?”

“Wormwood Scrubs, in Hammersmith?” she asked him, “I’ve got my own room and everything. Really close to the college too.”

“That’s great,” he told her, feeling intensely relieved that what had seemed like an impossible situation only a week ago now had such a neat ending, “are you looking forward to it?”

“Kind of,” she said, pulling his arms around her tighter, “do you think I’m making a mistake though, with art college?”

“No! What do you mean?” he exclaimed.

“What if I’m not good enough? What if everyone is better than me?” she asked in a rush.

“I bet you anything you’ll be a million times better than everyone else there,” he told her, nestling his cheek against her hair, “I’ve got faith in you.”

He realised she must have believed him because he felt her swell with pride slightly and she gave a low laugh.

“I’ve got faith in you too,” she replied, lifting up the entwined hands and giving his knuckles a kiss, “you wouldn’t dare make me a widow before you make me a bride would you?”

“Of course not,” he told her, “you’d kill me if I did.”

They both gave a laugh at this, before jumping unpleasantly as the clock chimed 6pm.

“It’s getting faster,” Kitty complained.

Mrs Weasley’s voice came sailing down the corridor, calling everyone to dinner. Harry gave a deep sigh, the day was being frittered away. All he wanted was to be alone with Kitty, yet suddenly the echoing, empty halls of Grimmauld Place were bursting with people.

However Mrs Weasley had, Harry had to grudgingly admit, outdone herself for their leaving feast. The dining table had been lengthened and was now bowing under the weight of the dishes that covered it, promising a delicious dinner.

Weasley’s of all ages were already seating themselves, Fred and George next to Bill and Fleur, who in turn were next to Remus, who was deep in conversation with Tonks. Harry grinned to himself, remembering catching his ex-professor and the Auror in the library at Hogwarts; he guessed nobody else knew about them.

“Look cosy don’t they?” whispered Harry into Kitty’s ear.

She shot Remus and Tonks a glance and turned back to him with a smirk on her face, “They’re so obvious!”

Harry laughed and slid into his seat between Kitty and Ron. She reached under the table and took his hand whilst they waited for everyone to seat themselves and pour drinks.

“What do you want?” he asked Kitty, glancing at the array of bottles and jugs covering the table.

“What’s good?” she asked, peering at the labels in interest.

“Pumpkin juice?” he offered.

“Pumpkin juice?” she laughed, taking the bottle and giving it an experimental sniff, “Yuck...do you really drink this stuff?”

Harry grinned and surveyed the rest of the drinks before Remus leaned over with a thick green glass bottle.

“Elvish wine?”

“Remus,” scolded Mrs Weasley with a frown, “they’re underage.”

“It’s only a glass Molly,” he told her calmly, filling theirs despite her annoyance, “and tonight’s a special occasion.”

“Hmmf,” was his only reply and the bottle was soon passed down the line so that Ron, Hermione and Ginny all had glasses of the ruby red wine.

Everyone was settled down and after a moment, Remus cleared his throat and stood up, “Can I say a few words before we start?”

Both Mrs and Mrs Weasley nodded their head as if giving their permission and Harry saw Tonks staring up at him intently.

“Well, as we all know it’s been a long summer, filled with many events, as usual.”

Harry gave an uncomfortable squirm, hoping sincerely he wasn’t about to be reprimanded for running away again in front of everyone. Kitty must have felt the same too because she squeezed his hand under the table for strength.



“In times like these, it’s very easy to get overtaken by the darkness and uncertainty, but we should take comfort from the fact that there are always those around to help us. So I’d just like to make a toast. To remember good friends lost, honour our friends for their support, and to welcome new friends to us.”

He smiled at Kitty.

“To friendship.”

“To friendship,” murmured everyone raising their glasses.

Many of them, Harry noticed with a fierce glow of pride in his stomach directed their toast to Kitty, who took a deep drink from her glass, avoiding their eyes. Everyone began to reach for the food before Kitty suddenly spoke up.

“Can I say something too?” she asked and after a blank look of surprise from Remus, he nodded his head encouragingly.

“Ok, I’m not actually very good a public speaking um...but I just wanted to say thank you I guess, for saving Harry, for saving both of us...” she trailed off, flushing under the silent stares from everyone, “and I’m sorry too...for all the fuss. So, um, thanks. It means a lot.”

“No problem,” quipped Tonks in a bright voice, “what’s a typical summer without a bit of danger and intrigue?”

Everyone sniggered and finally helped themselves to the food. Harry gave Kitty’s fingers a squeeze, -

“Good speech.”

“The delivery left a little to be desired,” she joked, reaching for the bowl of mashed potato.

Harry grinned and took another sip of the wine.

Meanwhile on the other side of the table Remus and Tonks delved right back into their conversation, automatically excluding the rest of the world.

“Good speech,” Tonks told him, giving him a quizzical look, “very meaningful.”

“Well, I think it’s time to get over the past and look towards the future,” he told her, before glancing over at Kitty, “I think hers was perhaps more significant.”

“I know...would you ever have thought when we first met her she’d be publically thanking us?” Tonks asked incredulously, shaking her head, “She’s certainly changed.”

“Harry wasn’t around then though was he?” Remus noted.

“They’re certainly very cosy tonight,” she said to him, and they both watched them for a moment, noting how closely they were sitting together, eyes only for each other.

“Well it’s their last night for a while, they’re bound to want to be close,” he said, sighing heavily, “can you imagine...”

Tonks understood what he was saying; could she imagine not seeing Remus for untold months?

“I think I’d go mad,” she replied honestly, “I’m surprised they’re taking it so well. Being stuck here surrounded by people, not sure when they’re going to see-”

Tonks stopped abruptly and Remus, who was mid-sip of his wine, looked over to her curiously.

“What is it Tonks?” he asked, following her gaze over to Kitty.

Tonks however didn’t reply, she merely stared at Kitty as if trying to work something out, frown plastered across her face.

“Tonks?” prompted Remus again.

“A Thought just occurred...” she said in a faraway voice.

“Did it hurt?” he joked, before noticing she looked extremely pensive, “What is it?”

“Look at Kitty’s hand.”

Remus glanced over at Kitty and saw at once what she was referring too. There, on Kitty’s finger was a small gold ring. It flashed in the candle light and seemed to shine like a beacon for a moment.

“Is that what I think it is?” asked Tonks in a hushed whisper.

“They wouldn’t,” Remus said sensibly, before watching Harry’s fingers brush the ring lightly and deliberately, “would they?”

“After what they’ve been through,” Tonks said urgently, “why wouldn’t they?”

“But they’re only 16!” Remus said incredulously.

“Exactly, they’re young and in love,” she replied, “it’s the sort of thing I’d have done, did do in fact...”

“With Charlie,” Remus reminded her, unable to keep an accusatory note out of his voice.

“Ooh, was that a hint of jealousy there?” Tonks asked with a laugh.

“No! Anyway, that’s not the point,” he said hurriedly, “what are we going to do about that?”

He motioned to the couple opposite them.

“We don’t know for certain it’s an engagement ring Remus,” she said sensibly, “and even if it was – what can we do about it? It’s their decision.”

“I know that...” said Remus, struggling with the concept, “but it’s a big commitment, they should properly think about this, plan for the future.”

“I think they’re past the big commitment stage Remus,” Tonks reminded him, “How many times has Kitty saved his life? Remember what they’ve been through? Besides, we don’t know what they’ve been getting up to during all those weeks they were missing.”

“You don’t think they’ve been sleeping together?” asked Remus in an anxious whisper.

“Who knows?” shrugged Tonks, “It’s not really any of our business is it?”

“Not really any of our business?” demanded Remus, “They’re 16! For all we know she could be pregnant! And Harry’s never had a father to sit down and give him the birds and the bees talk has he?”

“I’m sure he’s probably picked up more than enough from being in a boy’s dorm most of the year,” she told him with a laugh, “don’t you remember Gryffindor Tower?”

“Well, yes, but,” struggled Remus, cheeks flushing slightly, “I still think you should talk to them.”

“Why me?” demanded Tonks with a laugh, “You’re the one who wants to give him The Talk.”

“Well, somebody has to!” he insisted.

“It’s not my issue,” she said, holding her hands up, “it’s yours.”

“Well, I feel it’s my duty now,” he told her firmly, “It should have been James, or at least Sirius. I think I’ll talk to him tonight.”

“Bit late now,” giggled Tonks.

“You’re not taking this seriously are you?” he demanded of her.

“On the contrary,” she replied sweetly, “I think you’re really sexy when you get all intense like this.”

This was distracting enough for Remus to halt in his tracks, grinning happily to himself.

“Sexy?”

“Oh very,” she nodded, “so much so that I’m most looking forward to you finishing your talk with Harry so I can get you back to mine.”

He was so busy congratulating himself on this that it took him a long time to realise Tonks had successfully distracted him from his anxious thoughts about Harry’s future.

“You’re a wiley old thing Nymphadora,” he told her, shaking his head.

She merely bobbed her tongue out at him and said, “Speak to him if you want, and don’t call me Nymphadora!”

That evening dinner took a lot longer than it usually did at Grimauld Place. The Elvish wine, despite Remus’ previous promises, made several more passes round the table and everyone was chatting and laughing with increasingly loud voices. Even Mrs Weasley was to be seen faintly flushed and giggling girlishly with Mr Weasley. Ron pointed this out to Harry with a sickened smirk.

Kitty, whom Harry now knew to have reservations about both Ginny and Hermione, didn’t seem to remember this because she too was chatting with low, giggly voices with the two. Harry felt vaguely uncomfortable about the sort of things they could be talking about;

namely him. Both Kitty and Hermione had enough blackmail material now to make his life uncomfortable.

“Professor Lupin and Tonks seem cosy,” Ron remarked to him, nodding meaningfully across the table.

Harry glanced over, grinning to himself as they watched Tonks whispering something in Remus’ ear. They were sitting rather close.

“That’s because they’re a couple,” Harry told him in undertones, “me and Kitty caught them in the library at Hogwarts.”

“No way!” Ron exclaimed, so loudly that the three girls paused their mysterious discussions and looked at him suspiciously.

“You serious?” Ron whispered back.

“Always,” said Harry, “they’re trying to keep it a secret.”

“Unsuccessfully by the look of things,” he replied, giving twisted grin, “good on Professor Lupin, to get a stunner like Tonks.”

Harry snorted loudly with laughter, quickly trying to cover it with a cough as both Tonks and Remus glanced at him briefly. He merely turned to Ron with a curious expression on his face.

“You think Tonks is a ‘stunner’?” he laughed, watching the tip of his friends ears turn red.

“Well she is,” said Ron defensively, “don’t tell me you haven’t thought about it!”

“Hey, I’m taken,” Harry replied, “and I didn’t think she was your type.”

“And what’s my ‘type’?” asked Ron peevishly, stung now at Harry’s teasing.

“Oh you know, bookish brunettes,” he said airily.

Ron spluttered on the wine he was just gulping down and gave Harry a wild look of apprehension.

“What are you two whispering about?”

Both Harry and Ron looked across to the three girls with rather guilty expressions on their faces. Harry caught Kitty’s eye with a grin.

“Just talking about Ron’s ideal woman,” he told them.

“No we weren’t,” said Ron, shoving Harry in the arm a little more forcefully than the situation required.

“Oh really?” demanded Kitty with a gleam in her eye, “What did you come up with?”

“We weren’t talking about that,” Ron said stoutly, looking rather red in the face altogether now.

“Yeah we were,” Harry continued, enjoying watching his friend squirm and even more the look on Hermione’s face, “what was it we said Ron? B-”

“Stop ganging up on him you two,” cut in Hermione imperiously before Harry could continue, causing Kitty to grin even wider.

“We weren’t!” replied Kitty and Harry in unison.

They looked at each other for a moment before laughing loudly. Ron’s complexion slowly returned to normal and Hermione busied herself with spreading cheese onto her biscuits.

“Actually,” said Harry when the laughter had subsided, “we were talking about Lupin’s ideal woman.”

“Why?” asked Ginny with a bemused look on her face, she’d obviously noticed her brothers crush.

Harry merely shrugged enigmatically and nodded over to Tonks, who had chosen that moment to once again whisper something in Remus’ ear.

“No way!” exclaimed Ginny, sounding remarkably like Ron.

“Professor Lupin and Tonks?” asked Hermione, sounding shocked.

Harry merely shrugged as if to say, ‘I’m not saying anything, but...’

“Well...” she said, seemingly struggling for words, “good for them.”

“Huh?” demanded Ron.

“Well, I think it’s nice that they’ve both managed to find someone to make them happy,” said Hermione firmly, “they deserve it.”

“Plus,” pointed out Harry, emphasising his opinion with a cheese stick, “Tonks is a stunner.”

Ron gave Harry a swift smack on the arm and Kitty gave him a sweet and deadly smile.

“Say that again Potter,” she threatened.

“Ooh, back on the last name insult, Earl?” teased Harry, too merry on Elvish wine to fall for her tricks.

“Actually, that’s not my name anymore,” she said airily, as the others watched their discussion as one would follow a tennis match, gazing from right to left.

“Since when?”



“Since yesterday,” she reminded him, “can’t go around being Catherine Earl anymore can I, not with scary Death Eaters after me. Had to enrol in college and all that under a new name. My secret identity!”

Harry stared at her in surprise, not only because of the blasé way she described being hunted by a band of murderous psychopaths, but also because it had never occurred to him that she would have to change her name.

“What are down as then?” he demanded, feeling annoyed at himself for not finding out more about her new muggle life.

“Kaitlyn Connor,” she told him, measuring his reaction closely, “moved to London from the Midlands to go to college and living with my cousin Natalie Tonks, a policewoman, in Wormwood Scrubs.”

“Kaitlyn Connor,” repeated Harry, testing the name to see if it suited her, before deciding swiftly it did.

More so strangely enough, than her real name. Perhaps it was because Kaitlyn was closer to Kitty than it was to Catherine. Or maybe it was because there wasn’t much of the old Catherine left in her to recognise. For a fleeting moment he remembered the first time he’d met her and how they’d come to run away together, everything had changed so much since those early days. Hard to believe it was only a matter of weeks really.

“It’s a good name,” Ron was commenting, the others nodding in agreement.

“Sounds perfect,” added Hermione warmly.

Kitty merely shared a grin with Harry, before looking back over to them.

“You can call me Kitty for short,” she said with a smile.

Harry knew at that moment that she finally liked, and trusted, his friends.

Soon the last of the wine had been drunk, the final slices of cheese and crackers consumed and all that was left was for Mrs Weasley to usher them off to bed, tottering slightly and grinning to herself.

Everyone at the table one by one rose to their feet and Harry took hold of Kitty's hand, following Hermione and Ginny out of the kitchen. Just as they got to the foot of the stairs he quickly pulled her into the adjoining lounge that was mercilessly free of people.

Almost as soon as the door was closed he leant forward and kissed her almost desperately, as if he'd wanted to do it all night. She returned the kiss passionately, moulding her body against his and running her fingers through his hair.

When they broke apart she gave him a weak grin.

"Wanted to do that all night," she said breathlessly, arms still wrapped around his neck.

"Ditto," he said, giving her a swift kiss, "I really don't want to go to bed yet."

"I'm not tired at all," she said, grinning mischievously.

"Well, I think I'm well within my rights to keep my fiancé occupied, how about we-"

A sudden knock at the door startled them and a moment later Remus walked in. Harry stared at him in surprise as they both unconsciously shuffled apart, resorting to just holding hands.

"Sir?" asked Harry uncertainly, blushing faintly at having been caught by his ex-teacher.

"Kitty, you wouldn't mind if I had a word with Harry, would you?" Remus asked her politely, "Privately?"

She gave Harry the slightest of surprised looks.

“Er no, of course not,” she said, releasing Harry’s hand unwillingly, “I might go and get a book to read in bed, I’m not really feeling too tired yet. Good night.”

She gave Harry a meaningful look and slipped out of the room. Harry watched her go sadly before realising that Remus was watching him closely. He focussed on his ex-professor, trying not to appear as uncomfortable as he looked.

“I realise this must be very hard for you Harry,” he said, motioning for Harry to join him on the sofa, “being separated like this, having to say goodbye.”

“It’s not goodbye,” Harry shrugged awkwardly, dropping on the sofa next to him.

He wondered desperately what Remus could possibly want to talk to him about at this time of night.

“No, you’re right, it’s not,” said Remus encouragingly, “and Tonks will look after her well, we all will.”

Harry merely nodded, he realised that couldn’t possibly be what Remus had wanted to talk to him about and so waited to see what would come next.

“You’re very lucky to have found somebody you want to be with for the rest of your life so early.”

Of all the things Harry had been expecting him to say, that wasn’t it. He shot the man a swift, searching look.

“What?”

“I saw Cathy’s ring,” he explained.

“Oh. Right,” said Harry blankly.

“Her engagement ring?” he guessed.

Harry shrugged noncommittally. At least he knew what the talk was about now; Remus was going to tell him how stupid and childish he was being.

“Was that a yes?” asked Remus, obviously not letting Harry off lightly.

“Yeah,” muttered Harry, refusing to look his way.

“Congratulations,” he replied calmly.

“Thank you,” Harry said sarcastically.

Remus merely cocked an eyebrow at him and waited for Harry to explain himself but he wasn't going to dig himself into a hole. If Remus wanted to say something he'd just have to find the guts to say it.

“Are you really still angry at me?” Remus asked, taking Harry by surprise for the second time that night.

“What?”

“Before you ran away, when we argued, it sounded like you really, truly hated me,” he said in his usual measured, even tones, “and now...now you sound like you're waiting for me to start shouting at you.”

Harry felt slightly ashamed, but not enough to admit it.

“I am expecting you to start shouting at me.”

“Why?” demanded Remus, “When I have I ever shouted at you?”

“If you’re not going to shout at me what are you doing here?” Harry asked him.

The man regarded Harry with an unreadable expression on his face. As ever, Harry couldn’t tell what he was thinking and this always made him so much more on guard.

“To talk to you,” shrugged Remus, sitting back in his chair finally and continuing to regard Harry, “you’ve obviously just proposed to Kitty and I thought, maybe you’d want to share it with somebody. It doesn’t have to be a big secret. I’m happy for you both.”

“I don’t reckon Mrs Weasley would say the same,” Harry said, shocked at Remus’ words.

“Well, Mrs Weasley isn’t your mother,” said Remus sharply, causing Harry to grin appreciatively – he sounded like Sirius, “and I’m not your father and I know I’m not Sirius. But I hope I’m a friend and I’d hope that you’d trust me enough to respect your decisions. If you think Cathy is the one for you, then who am I to say she isn’t?”

“I – well...thank you,” Harry managed, shooting the man a curious look, “and you are...a friend I mean.”

Remus gave a pleased look that managed to slip past his usual guard and Harry couldn’t help but grin again.

“That means a lot to me Harry,” he said, leaning back into the sofa now and looking much more relaxed, “Now tell me, when did you decide to ask her?”

Harry thought about the question for a moment. In his heart he’d always known he was going to ask her, but events had overtaken them and pulled control of his life back out of his hands. This was probably the only decision he could make without consulting anyone – his decision.

“Maybe a long time,” he shrugged, “but probably yesterday, when I bought the ring.”

“Oh a whim?” smiled Remus.

“Sort of,” he laughed, “to be honest I think she’s mad for still wanting to be involved with us lot.

“If she’s come this far and still stood by you, I’d say that’s a pretty good indication,” Remus told him, “she’s definitely one in a million.”

“She’d love that description of her.”

“Did you know that your father proposed to your mother when they were just finishing sixth year?” Remus asked suddenly, “everyone thought they were mad, especially as she’d hated him for almost the entire time they’d known each other. But they knew, as I guess you do, that when it’s right, it’s right, and nothing will change that.”

Harry gazed avidly at Remus, he loved hearing any connection that brought him closer to his parents. It was comforting to know, as he’d told himself this morning, that his parents probably would have supported him.

“Of course, your mum would be absolutely thrilled she was a muggle,” Remus said, warming to his subject now, “and that she had a temper to match her own.”

Harry laughed appreciatively, “You haven’t even heard Kitty in full swing, we’ve had some real, horrible blazing rows.”

“Sounds familiar,” he replied, gazing off into the near distance thoughtfully, “I guess if its not hard work sometimes, it’s probably not worth it.”

“Hard works a good description of it,” Harry agreed, “but definitely worth it.”

This seemed to bring Remus back to the present because he fixed Harry with a sudden, penetrating look, as if he’d reminded him of something.

“It’s a big commitment Harry,” Remus told him, “you do realise that don’t you?”

“Yes.”

“And you do realise that you’re going to have to protect her and support her, no matter what?”

“Yes,” said Harry seriously.

“And that one day you’ll have a family, and you’ll have to protect them too?”

“If I live that long, yes.”

Remus’ eyes widened in shock, as if his blunt words had physically struck him.

“Is that why you’re doing this Harry? Rushing into things because you think your time is numbered?” he asked quietly.

“No,” said Harry honestly, “I know my time is numbered – everybody’s is. And we’re not rushing into things – we won’t get married until a year after the war’s over. I’m doing this because I love her and I promised I’d be with her for the rest of my life – no matter how long or short that is.”

“Harry...” began Remus, at a loss of what to say, “you’re not going to die...”

“Neither can live whilst the other survives,” quoted Harry, “Kitty knows that as well as I do. We just want whatever time we have to be worthwhile.”

“And look at that...” Remus said, gazing at Harry.

“Look at what?” Harry asked nonplussed.

“Just then...you turned from a boy into a man, right in front of my eyes,” he said in surprise.

Harry felt like he still had enough boy left in him to blush at these words and looked down at his hands for a moment.

“You’re parents would be so proud of you Harry,” he said in a soft voice, “they’d be so happy to know you turned out like them, despite the Dursley’s best efforts.”

Harry smiled. It wasn’t a happy smile or a sad one, just the smile of longing. Of wishing the same words were coming out of different mouths.

“I hope they would be.”

“I know they would be,” he said firmly, “and do you know what? The real reason I wanted to talk to you was to give you the whole birds and the bees sex talk. But I reckon you’ve got a sensible head on your shoulders and it’d be demeaning for me to lecture you.”

“And embarrassing,” added Harry, cheeks flushing darkly.

“I wasn’t looking forward to it much either,” admitted Remus, “but you will, be careful I mean, won’t you?”

“Of course...”

“Good, because if things went wrong now, you’d only hurt each other, but in the future, there’d be a child to consider.”

“I understand.”

“Good,” he repeated, looking very much like he was about to elaborate.



Suddenly Harry wanted to be out of the conversation, he couldn't stand the thought of Remus trying to lecture him on this of all things.

"Is that it Remus?" he asked, already making to stand up, "only I want to say goodnight to Kitty before she goes to bed."

"Oh. Well, yes of course," he said in a faraway voice, mind obviously dwelling on something.

Harry stood up and before leaving the room he looked down at his ex-professor. He guessed he'd just struck a chord with him because he looked as if he'd just had a revelation. He bade him goodnight and headed towards the door, before checking himself.

"I guess congratulations are in order for you too?" he said, pausing at the door handle.

"Hmmm....What?" asked Remus, looking over to him.

"You and Tonks," he explained with a grin.

"How did you-" he began, before realising he'd just admitted it.

Harry gave a shrug, "You're a bit obvious. But I'm happy for you both...you deserve it."

"I – thank you Harry," said Remus in amazement.

"Good night."

"Night Harry."

Harry grinned to himself, taking the stairs two at a time until he reached his floor and slipped into the room he was sharing with Ron. He was still up and sitting on the floor rummaging around in his trunk.

"You took your time," he said, voice muffled.

“Lupin just tried to give me The Talk,” he explained out, before laughing to himself and sinking onto his bed.

“The Talk?” Ron demanded, face appearing over the lid of his trunk looking aghast.

“ Yeah!” he laughed, trying not to recall the gut-wrenching embarrassment of it which he’d hoped he’d covered with his calm responses.

“ My dad tried that one on me this summer too,” Ron said in sympathy, “it was awful. A whole hour of euphemisms and vague hand gestures...honestly, he tried to draw diagrams!”

Harry really did howl with laughter now and Ron soon joined in, giving some amusing descriptions of some of the things Mr Weasley had tried to convey with his stick drawings.

“In the end I told him Charlie had done it for him last year and he got all offended and took the sketches away...thank Merlin,” Ron chuckled, “what is it with adults these day, is it written onto some calendar that it’s August, sex-talk time!”

“Dunno,” shrugged Harry, pulling a tee-shirt over his head, “I guess Lupin did it because I proposed to Kitty and he thinks-”

“WHAT?”

Ron actually fell off his bed. He grasped the lid of his trunk and pulled himself upright, gazing at Harry in horror.

“WHAT?” he repeated hoarsely.

“What?”

“YOU PROPOSED?”

“Yes!”

“TO KITTY?”

“Who else would I propose to?” Harry demanded incredulously.

“WHEN?”

“Last night!” Harry told him, smiling bemusedly at his friend’s violent reaction, “are you going to stop shouting or am I going to have to stun you?”

“WHY?”

“Because I felt like having a laugh,” mocked Harry sarcastically, “why do you think I did Ron?”

“Because you’re mad!” he spluttered.

“Why?”

“Because you are! Mad! You proposed to her, you’ve only known her a few weeks! You’re only 16!”

“Ron,” said Harry calmly, “you’re not taking this very well, calm down.”

“Calm down?” he said incredulously, “My best friends gone mad and you want me to calm down!”

“Why is this such a big deal?” asked Harry, watching Ron in the mirror reflection as he tried to tame his hair.

“Big deal...?” repeated Ron faintly, before jumping to his feet and standing behind him, “Big deal Harry? You proposed to her!”

“I know, I was there,” Harry said, knowing he was infuriating Ron with his calmness and enjoying himself immensely.

“But...”

“But what?” Harry asked, inspecting his teeth in the mirror now, “I love her, she loves me. It’s not going to change, so I thought, why the hell not?”

“Why the hell not...” repeated Ron faintly, looking at Harry as if he really had gone mad.

“If it makes you feel any better its not like we’re rushing down the aisle tomorrow,” Harry said, going back to messing with his hair.

“But...” tried Ron again, before suddenly seeming to see Harry clearly for the first time and asking suspiciously, “why are you doing that?”

“Doing what?” Harry asked, pausing.

“Preening yourself in front of the mirror,” he said accusingly.

“I’m not preening,” laughed Harry, “I’m making myself presentable – you should try it sometime.”

“Why?” demanded Ron, rising above the goading, “You’re just going to bed now.”

“Am I?” asked Harry, looking around for his socks now.

“Aren’t you?” Ron asked.

“No,” said Harry simply, locating his socks and pulling them on in an awkward one-footed hop.

“Where are you going?” he prompted.

“Got a study date,” he grinned, picking up his wand, “in the library.”

“What, now?” Ron asked, looking anxious, “you can’t – they’ll kill you if they find you sneaking about.”

“They can’t kill me, I’m The Chosen One remember?” said Harry with a twisted smile, “Oh come on Ron, it’s my last night with Kitty before we go back to Hogwarts, does it look like I care about being caught?”

“But...” spluttered Ron, looking entirely wrong-footed by Harry’s revelations.

“Don’t worry about me Ron,” said Harry cheerfully, clapping Ron’s cheek.

He reached into his own trunk and pulled out a small wooden box.

“What’s that?” Ron asked suspiciously.

“Spy snitch,” said Harry, flicking the lid open and showing Ron the small snitch that doubled as a spy camera, “Fred and George gave it to me at the beginning of the summer. It’s a lookout.”

“And they couldn’t give me one?” muttered Ron testily, “You’re gonna get into so much trouble if you’re caught.”

“That’s what the spy snitch is for,” Harry grinned, “don’t wait up.”

He slipped out of the room and commanded the spy snitch to watch the corridor for him, lighting his wand and creeping silently towards the library. The knowledge that this was probably his last chance to be alone with Kitty before he left for Hogwarts was at the forefront of his mind as he slipped through into the dusty room. The fire was low in the grate and at first he thought he’d been wrong in thinking Kitty had meant for him to come to the library after her, perhaps she really had wanted to get a book before bed?

“Oi speccy,” whispered a voice.

Harry turned around to find Kitty sitting up on the high windowsill, wrapped in a thick blanket.

“Hah, you looked round when I called you speccy,” she laughed, swinging her feet happily.

“You’re so immature,” Harry told her, holding his wand higher so he cast a bit more light on her, “what are you doing up there?”

“Admiring the view,” she told him, “come see.”

Harry put his wand between his teeth and attempted to climb up, using the bookshelves as a purchase and taking Kitty’s hand. He finally swung himself onto the windowsill and she threw the blanket around his shoulders too, tucking it in carefully. He watched her bemusedly, before she caught him and gave him a playful shove, causing him to fumble with his wand for a moment.

“Let’s have a look then,” she said, holding out her hand.

He passed her his wand, the tip of which dimmed and went out as it left his grasp. She studied it in the gloom before passing it back to him.

“Lumos,” he muttered and once again they were bathed in light.

“It won’t work for me?” she asked him, still staring at it.

“No,” he told her. “The wand chooses the wizard...and anyway, even Hermione would have difficulty using it, we find it really hard to use any wand but our own...But muggles...can’t. Sorry.”

“Don’t apologise,” she shrugged, “I just wondered...when we were in the graveyard I got one of the Death Eaters wands. It wouldn’t work for me then either.”

Harry nodded, unconsciously twirling his wand between his fingers.

“Show us what you can do then,” she challenged him.

“You want to see magic?” he asked in surprise.

“Hey, if you’re sticking around I better get used to it,” she joked, “anyway I trust you...”

Harry smiled at her before looking around for inspiration – what to show her...He wondered what he’d most like to see, if he were secretly scared of what magic could do, before the perfect spell came into his mind. He gave a sidelong look at Kitty and realised he was going to spend the rest of his life with her.

“Expecto patronum.”

The silvery stag leapt out of the end of his wand, looking brighter and more real than he’d ever seen it before. Kitty gasped in amazement as it fell lightly and soundlessly to the floor of the library and cantered around, filling the entire room with a warm glow. Unthinkingly, Harry gave a low whistle and was as surprised as Kitty when the stag immediately trotted over to them as if answering his masters’ call.

“It’s a patronus,” Harry told her in a low voice, “it protects you from bad things.”

It was a simplified explanation, but an accurate one, and Harry watched Kitty as she stared at it in awe reaching out her hand as if to stroke it’s head before pausing and drawing back slightly.

“Can I?” she asked him.

“Go ahead,” he told her.

She reached out with a trembling hand to where the stags’ antlers nested between its ears. However, Harry was surprised to see her hand pass right through the silvery form and Kitty looked slightly disappointed.

“But it looks so real,” she whispered.

“It is,” he told her, reaching out and ran a hand down the stags’ neck. It felt warm and very real beneath his fingers.

Kitty watched this with a faint trace of envy crossing her features for a moment.

“What’s it made out of?” she asked him.

“Positive thoughts and happy memories,” he told her, before dropping his hand and letting the patronus canter away again, “you can only produce one if you’re really focussed and think of only good and happy things. That’s why they’re so difficult because when you really need to make one of these, you’re definitely not capable of thinking happy, positive thoughts.”

“It’s beautiful,” Kitty told him, “do they all look like that?”

“No, everyone’s is individual to them. Ron’s is this little yapping dog and Hermione’s is a gambolling otter. It generally takes the shape of something important to you or something you associate with protection.”

“Why’s yours a stag then? Why’s that important to you?”

Harry gave a laugh, where to begin with a question like that? So he started at the beginning, with the Marauders, how they found out that one them was a werewolf and their plan to keep him company. Before he knew it he’d been talking for half an hour, answering all her questions about his father, everything he knew as well as everything else he’d guessed or surmised.

“I wonder what mine would be?” she mused out loud, “If I could make one, I mean.”

“What would make you feel safe?” he asked her.

“I don’t know, I’ve never felt safe,” she said before she could stop herself and trying to cover it with a laugh, “maybe a really vicious dog?”



Harry gave a slight laugh, busying himself with wrapping the blanket back around them tighter and snaking his arm around her waist. He pulled her closer and with a sigh she leant her head on his shoulder.

“What do you think is going to happen now Harry?” she asked him in a muffled voice, “With Riddle still out there?”

“Well, now the Ministry knows about Voldemort they’ll be on the lookout for the Death Eaters. Voldemort will want to gather more troops together I guess, take over the Ministry in the end. He’ll try and find me and the rest of the Order, get rid of any resistance,” he told her, not even bothering to pretend the world would be full of happiness and roses, “when he’s in power it’ll be the muggle-borns and muggle families that’ll be targeted first, then half-bloods and blood-traitors next...”

“How can you say all that so calmly?” she asked him quietly, “That’s your friends you’re talking about, and yourself.”

Harry shrugged, “No point in worrying about what the future might bring, we’re all here now aren’t we?”

“For now,” she told him, “but you’re forgetting that Malfoy guy’s up to something – what if Riddle’s given him a job he can only do at school? Like getting to you.”

“At least I’m forewarned,” Harry told her, “I’ll keep my eye on him, try and find out what he’s up to, and I’ll tell everyone and anyone I can so they can keep an eye out too. But I’ll find out what he’s doing, I can promise you that.”

“You think he really is a Death Eater?” she asked him anxiously.

“Well he’s definitely got the Dark Mark,” he replied, “but Malfoy’s no problem, he’s not particularly talented or smart, he’ll make a mistake.”

“You don’t have to be talented or smart to cause a lot of damage,” she warned him, “he sounds like he’s a cunning, evil little bastard too,

he might not care if he makes a mistake or who he hurts in the process.”

Harry wondered if she was right, did he really underestimate Malfoy? Probably, he answered himself honestly. He’d known him for a while now and knew he wasn’t brilliant but maybe Kitty was right, Malfoy probably wouldn’t care who he hurt along the way if he was jumping to Voldemort’s orders. If Harry knew Voldemort, he’d set Malfoy something impossible, just to see him fail and to be able to punish him. If Malfoy knew that, he’d be more dangerous than Harry had previously given him credit for.

“I’ll be careful,” Harry promised him, “but I’m more worried about you.”

“Why?” she asked blankly

“Because I won’t be around to look out for you, because I’m abandoning you,” he told her.

“First of all matey, I’m quite capable of looking after myself. Who was it that walked away from the graveyard without a scratch and who was in a coma?”

“Voldemort underestimated you then,” Harry replied earnestly, thinking she wasn’t taking him seriously, “he won’t make the same mistake twice.”

“I’m a stupid muggle remember?” she told him with a grin, “of course he’ll underestimate me again, I don’t fit in with his ideology.”

Now he knew she wasn’t taking him seriously.

“Kitty, I’m being serious now,” he told her, twisting around to face her properly, “don’t do anything stupid because you think he won’t be looking for you.”

“Harry I know he’ll be looking for me ok? Do you think I don’t know that?” she snapped suddenly.

He regarded her silently for a moment. He realised he'd been reading her wrong, she wasn't being blasé at all, she was just trying to be stoic.

"Sorry, you're right," he admitted, "I just want you to be careful. Don't trust anybody, especially if they start asking prying questions or seem a little off. Don't mention me to anyone and don't go off with any strangers and-

"You sound like a nagging parent," she cut in, sounding offended.

"I'm not trying to," he pleaded with her, "I just don't want you to be caught out...He plays mind tricks on you, you know – makes you think things that aren't real. He did it to me, made me think Sirius was captured...If you ever think something's happened to me, don't do anything until somebody you really trust tells you it's true."

"But-

"I mean it Kitty! There's nothing you could do anyway and you could be walking right into a trap."

"Oh I see, so just because I'm a muggle I wouldn't be able to do anything, help?" she demanded, "I'll remind you of that next time you decide to try to bleed all across the floor or get poisoned."

"I didn't mean it like that," Harry sighed.

"How did you mean it?"

"I don't want to argue now, it's our last night," he said.

"I'm not arguing!" she told him, "I just want to know what you meant by that?"

"I meant that if Voldemort really did have me, chances are I'd be dead long before you could get there to do anything."

She regarded him for a long moment, eyes searching his before looking away. Harry knew he'd probably been a little too blunt, he was just trying to appear calm for her sake and thought he might have gone overboard.

"Kitty-" he began with a sigh, already constructing an apology.

"No you're right," she said in a far off voice, "I promise not to interfere, not until I know for sure something's happening. If Riddle does get you though, there's not really any point to all of this is there? What would I have left?"

"Don't talk like that," Harry said, wrapping an arm around her and gathering the blankets, "you've got a whole, long life to lead. Away from everything and everyone right? A fresh start? I want to see you getting old and wrinkly."

"I will if you will," she suggested, before squeezing his hand under the blanket, "don't worry...How many times have they tried to break us apart, and how many times have we just been brought closer together? Fate can't cheat us, we're fated to be together."

"A regular Romeo and Juliet?" he asked, remembering her words all those weeks ago in the Hospital Wing.

"No not like them at all," she told him firmly, "we'll get our happy ever after."

As they sat there in the cold library, counting down the hours before they'd be parted, they reflected on what shape this happy ever after would take. They planned for the future, laughed at each others silly or romantic thoughts, never once voicing their deepest fears. Why would they, Harry asked himself as the sun crept up, there'd be months, maybe even years to do that, alone.

Morning came too soon. Noises from beyond the library door indicated the house was awakening and Kitty and Harry were now sat

on the sofa, blanket wrapped around the two of them as they occasionally swapped an odd comment.

His eyes were itching now from staying up all night and a horrible feeling of panic and dread was growing in his stomach. Not long now, not even hours to go...

"What time is it?" mumbled Kitty, head buried into her shoulder.

"Nearly seven," Harry said, feeling another lurch of nerves, "breakfast time."

She hitched her breath and he wrapped his arm around her tighter.

"This feels really weird," she admitted, sounding almost frightened, "I can't believe you'll be gone soon...we've spent nearly every minute together for months...What am I going to do without you?"

"I know," was all he could say, not able to think of anything more comforting.

"I feel sick," Kitty said flatly, "this is wrong."

"It is!" said Harry fiercely, feeling the unfairness of it all wash over him suddenly, "I wish you could come to Hogwarts with me."

"Do you wish I was magical?"

"I didn't mean it like that," he said hastily, "I wish you could just come with me...not study or anything."

"I sometimes wish I could be magical," she admitted in a small voice, "I keep imagining what it would be like, living in Hogwarts, going to classes with you, finding out all the cool stuff you can do."

"It's dangerous," Harry told her, "and nothing would change if you were magical...I like how normal you are."

“Gee thanks Harry,” she said sarcastically, “a girl could do a lot with a compliment like that.”

“You know I didn’t mean it like that,” he told her, not even taking her bait, “unique’s a better word...you’re unique.”

She smiled faintly, “That’s better.”

Before they could continue their conversation they heard voices approaching the library doors; two very familiar voices that could bicker like no one else.

“-knock first is all I’m saying,”

The door swung open to reveal Hermione, already dressed and wide awake, Ron trailing behind her looking sheepish.

“Morning guys,” Harry said, managing only to flick his wrist towards them as his other arm was still wrapped around Kitty.

Hermione however was on a mission. She strode over until she was standing in front of them, strange mixtures of emotions flittering across her face, obviously she was undecided as to which one to embrace.

“Is it true?” she demanded of Harry, looking every bit the domineering professor.

Ah, that was it, Ron had told him about proposing to Kitty. He shot Ron an annoyed look, who merely stared at his feet, tips of his ears betraying his feelings.

“Is what true?” Harry asked innocently.

“Ron told me,” she began, before taking a steadying breath, “that you proposed to Cath- to Kitty.”

“He did, did he?” he said, as Ron jiggled from foot to foot.

He could feel Kitty's shoulders shaking with silent laughter and after a moment she pulled herself out of his arms to sit up properly and regard the girl.

"So is it true?" Hermione demanded quickly.

"Yes."

Hermione actually reeled back in shock.

"And you said yes?" she exclaimed, looking at Kitty now.

She merely ran her fingers through her slightly matted hair before holding up her hand; gold ring glinting in the early morning light. Hermione stared at it for much longer than was necessary or polite, a range of emotions flickering across her face; disbelief, amazement, annoyance before finally settling on shock and outrage.

"I can't believe you two!" she exclaimed, "Of all the stupid things you've done Harry this ranks right up there!"

"Hey!" he said angrily, feeling stung by her tone, "This is probably the smartest thing I've done actually!"

"And you!" she merely said, rounding on Kitty, "You know how impulsive he is, you shouldn't encourage him!"

"He didn't need any encouragement from me," replied Kitty, far from being angry her voice was full of humour.

Harry however was still annoyed at Hermione's reaction; if Remus had accepted Harry's decision like an adult, then why couldn't she?

"What's your problem Hermione?" he demanded.

"I – well..." she spluttered, obviously rendered speechless, "You're only 16! Only just 16 too! I understand you've been through a lot together this summer, but marriage? That's a massive commitment! You're only known each other less than two months!"

“We’re only engaged Hermione,” Kitty said, speaking before Harry could retort angrily, “it’s not like we’re rushing down the aisle tomorrow. And besides, we’ll have years to reconsider, right Harry?”

He could help but grin at her joke, despite his annoyance.

“Well...good...” said Hermione uncertainly, “and of course, you know I am happy for you...it’s just, rather sudden and unexpected...”

“You don’t sound happy for us,” Harry said, watching her closely.

He could see how much of an internal struggle this was for Hermione; fighting between supporting him and disapproving on moral grounds. He knew how much his friend hated breaking any rules or behaving differently in any way and it was quite intriguing to watch this personal struggle happening before his eyes.

“Of course I’m happy for you,” she said finally, in a soft voice, “just, a little shocked I guess.”

“Not completely shocked to be honest,” said Ron, speaking for the first time now he’d sensed the danger had passed.

“Not completely shocked?” scoffed Harry, “Who was it that was shouting at a hundred decibels last night and falling off his bed?”

“You caught me off guard,” muttered his friend sullenly.

Kitty laughed quietly and Harry caught her glancing at the clock, shadow pass over her expression when she caught sight of the time.

“We’re going for breakfast now,” Hermione said, catching this interchange, “coming?”

“I might skip it,” Harry said, glancing at Kitty for confirmation.



“We’ll be leaving soon,” she cautioned tentatively, as if trying to measure what reaction this news would arouse in Kitty and himself.

“Exactly,” he replied.

Hermione and Ron got the message and left. He turned to Kitty, who seemed to be a mirror for the expression he knew he had on his face now.

“Not long at all,” she said uneasily, “I thought this summer would never end...”

“It wasn’t meant too,” he said, reaching up and tucking a lock of her new hair behind her ears, “I’m sorry all this happened...Sorry I didn’t turn about to be the normal guy you were looking for.”

“What’s so good about being normal?” she asked him, looking suddenly very coy, “Anyway, it feels like my life didn’t even start until that day on the bus you sat next to me.”

“I know what you mean...I’m glad I caught the same bus as you,” Harry told her, picking up her hands and intertwining his fingers with hers.

“I’m glad my stepdad was a bastard and we ran away together,” she countered.

“Well I’m glad you came back when we had that horrible row, I’m glad you trusted me with your secrets.”

“Well I’m glad that you didn’t die.”

“I’m glad you saved me.”

“I think the magic potion probably saved you...”

“Not just for then Kitty, for saving me over and over again. For saving me from myself. For always being the one that will save me.”

Kitty nodded heavily, eyes glistening now, showing the same emotion that was squeezing Harry's heart, making it difficult to breathe.

"You saved me too Harry," she managed, placing a hand over his heart, "in every possible way..."

There was a knock at the door and they both jumped. Harry's heart felt like a rolling drumbeat now. -

Remus pushed open the door and stood on the threshold.

"Time to go Harry," he said, looking as if he were delivering a death sentence.

He could only nod mutely, before turning back to Kitty. The door clicked shut behind him.

"I guess this is it," she said with some difficulty, tears shining in her eyes.

"I guess," he said weakly.

"You will write to me, won't you?" she demanded quickly, seconds numbered and limited now.

"Every day, I promise," he told her, feeling his heart squeezing painfully.

She couldn't reply, and he couldn't think of anything to say. A million and one things he should tell her were running through his mind now, all of which seemed equally important, all of which he'd never got around to saying. The long months of their summer had seemed endless, they'd wasted so much time, so much time they could have used better.

Tears were sliding freely down her cheeks now and Harry raised his hands to her face, brushing them aside with his thumbs. Far from

helping, this made her even sadder and she reached out to pull him closer.

It was a bittersweet kiss. Full of love and longing, pain and sorrow. It promised so much but also marked the end. Their summer was now over, from this moment they were walking down separate paths.

As Harry pulled Kitty closer to her, he felt her tears wetting his own cheeks and he couldn't help imagining them stepping into a dark forest. He could see her setting off on a different path, running alongside his, but hidden from him. Occasional glimpses of her figure could be seen through the trees and he had no idea how long it would take for their paths to rejoin.

If they ever did.

When she pulled away she merely rested her forehead against his, noses still touching. It was a familiar position from hundreds of summer kisses, and here was the last. She gave him another swift, brief kiss before staring him firmly in the eye.

"Come back to me," she commanded fiercely.

"I will," he promised.

"Always come back to me."

"I will."

Behind them the door opened again and Remus and Tonks walked in. They were both silent, but it was not the time for words. Harry thought that if he didn't leave now, he never would.

He leaned forward and placed his final kiss to his Catherine Earl, his Cathy, Caz and Kitty on her forehead.

Then he got to his feet quickly and strode from the room, knowing that if he looked back or hesitated, his resolve would break and he'd never leave her side again. The only consolation, he told himself as

he marched through to house to the waiting car, was that she would be safer without him around.

He furiously wiped his eyes before stepping out into the sunshine.

Meanwhile Tonks and Kitty were left in the library. Kitty had begun to sob, not caring that everyone could see her and probably hear her; no one could understand the heart breaking despair she felt at that moment.

Distantly she heard the car pulling away, taking her Harry further and further away from her with every second. She could almost feel the hole in her soul growing.

When the tears finally ran out she'd sat for what felt like an eternity, just staring into the middle distance. Then she became aware once again that other people were in the room, and she felt strangely glad that Tonks hadn't tried to comfort her.

She looked over to her friend, whose hair was a sombre black shade to suit the occasion. She gave a small nod, hoping it would explain.

"Ok?" was all she asked.

"Ok..." Kitty replied hoarsely.

"Right then. Time for your new life too, Kaitlyn Connor," Tonks proclaimed, holding out her rucksack.

Kitty took it, hoisted it over her shoulder and wiped the tears from her face. The path ahead was dark and uncertain and she didn't know where it would lead or when it would end. All she knew was that she was going to end it as she started it; with hope, and Harry in her arms.

AN/ Two more chapters to go till the end, they're almost finished so you'll get to see how their stories end. I could have written a whole life for Kitty during book 6 and 7, but don't have the time now! I'll leave it up to you to imagine it, and let you read the upcoming Chapter 33 and the Epilogue, which should fill in the blanks!

## Chapter Thirty Three

### Days In Our Lives: Year Six

14th September 1996

I wish this could be  
A happy song  
But my happiness disappeared  
The moment you were gone  
Don't think I ever believed that  
This day would come  
Now all I'm feeling  
Is lost and numb

It amazed Harry that after everything that had occurred during his summer he could slip back into Hogwarts life as if everything was normal and he'd never been away. Suddenly it was back to classes, back to the corridors and routine, the same faces; a little paler, a little more scared looking perhaps, but all the same nonetheless.

Kitty, Wolverhampton and their summer together was a million miles and a million years away. Now instead of worrying about the big things like the Order of Voldemort tracking him down or Kitty discovering his secret, he was worried instead about little things. Like when Hagrid would talk to them again after dropping his class, how to keep up with their mountain of NEWT work or whether he'd be a good Quidditch captain.

It was early morning and he was sitting with Ron and Hermione at the breakfast table. It was only a few weeks since he'd left Kitty at Grimmauld Place and he couldn't seem to shake the dark cloud that had followed him that day. Being separated from her had caused a horrible ache to develop in his heart; he wondered if it would ever stop hurting or even fade slightly.

He hadn't shared this with his two friends of course, he didn't think they'd understand; they just seemed to be happy that he was back with them at Hogwarts.

Hermione was flustering as usual and he tried to tune into the conversation.

"We've got to go and explain," said Hermione, looking up at Hagrid's huge empty chair at the staff table.

Harry glanced up and saw his largest friend was indeed conspicuous by his absence.

"We've got Quidditch tryouts this morning!" said Ron. "And we're supposed to be practicing that Aguamenti Charm from Flitwick! Anyway, explain what? How are we going to tell him we hated his stupid subject?"

"We didn't hate it!" said Hermione.

"Speak for yourself, I haven't forgotten the skrewts," said Ron darkly, "and I'm telling you now, we've had a narrow escape. You didn't hear him going on about his gormless brother — we'd have been teaching Grawp how to tie his shoelaces if we'd stayed."

"I hate not talking to Hagrid," said Hermione, looking upset.

Harry nodded in agreement, after everything Hagrid had done for them he deserved better, he recalled Kitty telling him about her first meeting with Hagrid, being taken to his cabin and given a sneak of firewhiskey.

"We'll go down after Quidditch," Harry assured her, "but trials might take all morning, the number of people who have applied."

He felt slightly nervous at confronting the first hurdle of his Captaincy, "I dunno why the team's this popular all of a sudden."

"Oh, come on, Harry," said Hermione, suddenly impatient, "it's not Quidditch that's popular, it's you! You've never been more interesting."

Harry stared at her blankly whilst Ron gagged on a large piece of kipper. Hermione spared him one look of disdain before turning back to Harry.

"Everyone knows you've been telling the truth now, don't they? The whole Wizarding world has had to admit that you were right about Voldemort being back and that you really have fought him twice in the last two years and escaped both times. And now they're calling you 'the Chosen One'...well, come on, can't you see why people are fascinated by you?"

Harry glanced around the hall, noticing indeed that people seemed to be shooting him more than the usual number of glances. He hadn't noticed, that night in the Ministry had seemed like so long ago and so much had happened since that time he was forgetting it was new news for some people.

"And you've been through all that persecution from the Ministry when they were trying to make out you were unstable and a liar. You can still see the marks on the back of your hand where that evil woman made you write with your own blood, but you stuck to your story anyway..."

With a grimace Harry wondered if everyone would be so enamoured with him if they knew that he'd run away that summer and hidden away from everything. Sure he'd stuck by his story, but he hadn't stuck by the wizarding world.

Trying to shake these thoughts, he decided to focus on the day in hand. He found that if he had a busy schedule and plenty of things to do, the amount of time he spent thinking and worrying about Kitty went down. Not that he still didn't think about her, it was amazing how something would remind him of her, something as innocuous as a jumper, or a tune popping into his head.

He wondered how her new life at college was going, whether she'd made many friends, whether she was thinking about him as much as he was thinking about her.

“Ooh good, post’s arriving,” he heard Hermione exclaim beyond his reverie.

Sure enough the post owls were arriving, swooping down through rain-flecked windows and scattering everyone with droplets of water. He’d noticed that this year most people were receiving more post than usual; anxious parents were keen to hear from their children and to reassure them, in turn, that all was well at home.

Harry had so far received several letters from Kitty, who’d obviously been taught by Tonks how the postal system worked in their world. It made him grin to think of the expression on her face when Tonks had explained about the owls. He looked up hopefully and saw to his surprise that not only was the standard brown postal owl swooping down towards him but the snowy white Hedwig was circling too.

The brown owl alighted on the table first and held out its leg to Harry. He was happy to see Kitty’s handwriting on the muggle envelope and quickly picked it up, sliding it into his pocket. Secrecy was the new byword of the moment and he couldn’t afford people seeing him getting more post than usual.

Hermione and Ron both noticed it but said nothing. He was desperate to read it there and then but couldn’t afford anyone seeing him. Hedwig was a welcomed distraction, landing in front of him carrying a large, square package. A moment later, an identical package landed in front of Ron, crushing beneath it his minuscule and exhausted owl, Pigwidgeon.

"Ah-ha!" said Harry, unwrapping the parcel to reveal a new copy of Advanced Potion-Making, fresh from Flourish and Blotts.

His current copy was a battered leftover from Snapes stores and Harry had discovered it contained the helpful notes of a previous owner, who’d nicknamed himself the ‘Half-Blood Prince’. He was a genius at potions and Harry had found that following the Princes instructions he was suddenly developing new found skills at potions. Hermione however, disapproved of his ‘cheating’ at potions with the help of the book and looked delighted to see his new copy in hand.



"Oh good," she exclaimed, "now you can give that graffitied copy back."

"Are you mad?" said Harry, having given this a lot of thought during his sleepless nights, "I'm keeping it! Look, I've thought it out..."

He pulled the old copy of Advanced Potion-Making out of his bag and tapped the cover with his wand, muttering, "Diffindo!" The cover fell off. He did the same thing with the brand-new book (Hermione looked scandalised). He then swapped the covers, tapped each, and said, "Reparo!"

There sat the Prince's copy, disguised as a new book, and there sat the fresh copy from Flourish and Blotts, looking thoroughly secondhand.

"I'll give Slughorn back the new one, he can't complain, it cost nine Galleons."

Hermione pressed her lips together, looking angry and disapproving, but was distracted by a third owl landing in front of her carrying that day's copy of the Daily Prophet. She unfolded it hastily and scanned the front page.

"Anyone we know dead?" asked Ron in a determinedly casual voice; he posed the same question every time Hermione opened her paper.

"No," she began, eyes flitting backwards and forwards across the page, "although, they've apparently found a body of a muggle in Derby...been dead for several weeks apparently."

Harry grimaced with distaste, only able to keep half an ear on the conversation now as he felt Kitty's letter burning his pocket; he wanted to go and read it now before Quidditch trials otherwise he wouldn't be able to concentrate.

"There's been more dementor attacks," Hermione was saying, "and an arrest."

This caught Harry's attention.

"Excellent, who?" he asked, thinking of Bellatrix Lestranger.

"Stan Shunpike," said Hermione.

"What?" said Harry, startled.

"Stanley Shunpike, conductor on the popular Wizarding conveyance the Knight Bus, has been arrested on suspicion of Death Eater activity. Mr. Shunpike, 21, was taken into custody late last night after a raid on his Clapham home. . ."

"Stan Shunpike, a Death Eater?" said Harry, remembering the spotty youth he had first met three years before, "No way!"

"He might have been put under the Imperius Curse," said Ron reasonably, "you never can tell."

"It doesn't look like it," said Hermione, who was still reading, "it says here he was arrested after he was overheard talking about the Death Eaters' secret plans in a pub."

Harry frowned, a look mirrored by Ron across the table from him.

She looked up with a troubled expression on her face, "If he was under the Imperius Curse, he'd hardly stand around gossiping about their plans, would he?"

"It sounds like he was trying to make out he knew more than he did," said Ron, "isn't he the one who claimed he was going to become Minister of Magic when he was trying to chat up those veela?"

"Yeah, that's him," said Harry, "I dunno what they're playing at, taking Stan seriously."

"They probably want to look as though they're doing something," said Hermione, frowning, "people are terrified - you know the Patil twins' parents want them to go home? And Eloise Midgen has already been withdrawn. Her father picked her up last night."

"What!" said Ron, goggling at Hermione, "But Hogwarts is safer than their homes, bound to be! We've got Aurors, and all those extra protective spells, and we've got Dumbledore!"

"I don't think we've got him all the time," said Hermione very quietly, glancing toward the staff table over the top of the Prophet, "haven't you noticed? His seat's been empty as often as Hagrid's this past week."

Harry and Ron looked up at the staff table. The headmaster's chair was indeed empty. Now Harry came to think of it, he had not seen Dumbledore since their private lesson a week ago and he wondered where he'd been disappearing to.

"I think he's left the school to do something with the Order," said Hermione in a low voice, "I mean...it's all looking serious, isn't it?"

Harry and Ron did not answer, but Harry knew that they were all thinking the same thing. There had been a horrible incident the day before, when Hannah Abbott had been taken out of Herbology to be told her mother had been found dead. They had not seen Hannah since.

"It's only the beginning too," said Harry heavily, wondering for the thousandth time what Voldemort was up to now and whether Kitty now featured in his plans.

"Come on," said Ron bracingly, "let's not think about this now. Let's get down to the pitch."

All three of them rose to go and Harry remembered Kitty's letter. There was no way he was waiting until after the tryouts to read it.

"I've got something I need to do first," he told them significantly and they both had the presence of mind not to ask questions.

As they walked out into the grounds Harry detached himself from his friends and found a sheltered spot against the wall of the castle. He

lowered himself onto the cold ground and after casting a secrecy charm around him, pulled out Kitty's letter.

He stared for a long moment at the envelope, her handwriting, trying to imagine what she'd looked like as she wrote it. After taking a deep breath he slowly peeled open the envelope and pulled out several sheets of paper from a muggle spiralbound notebook as well as what looked like a newspaper cutting.

He went instinctively to the letter first, desperate now to see her familiar handwriting, hear her voice in his head reading the words aloud.

Dear Harry.

Can't believe it's only been two weeks since you left. Feels like a lifetime.

Am finding living with Tonks really great, it's nice to have someone to talk to and a place to call my own. I tell myself we're just normal 'muggle' flatmates and that makes it easier. Living in the magical world is bizarre and is taking a bit of getting used to. Tonks and Remus don't think anything about whipping their wand out for any little problem and I forget sometimes, so seeing things flying through the air still creeps me out.

College is ok, you know me, I'm not really one for academia and going to classes and all that stuff and I'm already struggling to keep up with the work. We have to do really boring history of art classes, which are a complete waste of time. But the practical lessons are good, my lecturer Nile is really funny, he doesn't mind me taking the piss out of him a bit and he's a right bastard to me; we have a good relationship. I'm currently painting something for Pops for Christmas to go in his big office, hope he'll like it. I'm thinking of it as a 'thanks for saving my life' gift.

You'll be pleased to hear I'm being ultra-safety conscious and all the forgetful potions and charms Tonks has me wearing is making me practically invisible to everyone. It's a bit depressing really, I haven't

really made friends with anybody yet, but why should I? It's not like I can go and hang out with them outside college or invite them home.

Sorry, I'm not really complaining, just a little down. I miss you.

I guess another reason for being so depressed is not many people get to read their own obituary. Take a look at the newspaper cutting. Tonks said there should be one in your newspaper this morning too.

Feels weird to see your own death.

Speak to you soon, hopefully.

I love you.

Kitty x

Harry dropped the letter to his lap, frowning at her tone. She didn't sound too good at all, in fact he could just imagine the mood she'd been in when she'd written it; depressed. He always worried about her when she was in these moods and it was even worse now that he couldn't be there to help her out of it.

Before he could give too much thought to this his eyes fell on her final paragraph. The hint made him feel uncomfortable and ominously he picked up the enclosed newspaper cutting and unfolded it. It was from a muggle newspaper and as he opened it he was immediately greeted by a massive headline and a very outdated photo of Kitty, looking no more than 13.

## MISSING GIRL DISCOVERED DEAD

The body of missing teenager Catherine Earl was discovered yesterday in woods near the town of Greater Hangleton in Derby. Earl was reported missing over a month ago after a disturbance at her home in Crawley, Surrey. The sixteen year old was last seen leaving her home in the early hours of the morning after a violent argument broke out with her stepfather Ian Banks, who was later arrested for his part in a cocaine racket in the county.

In a formal statement this morning DCI Watson said, "We have yet to establish the cause of death, or why Catherine should be found so far from the place she was last seen. If anyone has any information relating to this case, please contact us immediately. We are treating her death as extremely suspicious and await the results of the post-mortem."

The body of Catherine Earl was discovered in the early hours of yesterday morning by dog-walkers less than a mile from the remains of Little Hangleton church, which was burned down a month ago. The police are treating the two incidents as linked and are asking for anybody who was in the area on that night to come forward.

The police are also investigating whether there is a link between Catherine's death and the murder of her stepbrother, whose body was discovered in Manchester just over a month ago.

The newspaper clipping fluttered to the floor as Harry could only stare at it, and the aged picture of Kitty, in utter shock. Even though he knew that this was obviously not a real report of Kitty's murder, only a cover up by Tonks and the Order to throw Voldemort off her track, he couldn't help but feel intensely affected; as if seeing the words in black and white suddenly made them true.

After all, they could so easily have been accurate, Kitty could have died that night in the graveyard, just as he nearly did. With shaking hands he picked up the cutting and read it over again, aware of nothing but the words and the horrible churning feeling in his stomach; he felt sick.

Cold waves passed over him and he couldn't help but shiver even though it was relatively mild outside. With a sudden start he pulled out the Daily Prophet and looked at the article Hermione had briefly mentioned that morning.

### Muggle Found Dead: Unforgivable Suspected

The body of a muggle teenager was discovered by Aurors in woods near Greater Hangleton in Derby yesterday morning. Aurors have attributed the girl's death to an unforgivable curse and as further

proof of the rise of Death Eater activity. The muggle police have been informed and have taken over the case. The girls stepfather has been contacted. As of yet there has been no motive established for the attack.

Harry shivered once more, dropping the newspaper onto the pile on his lap and tilting his head back against the wall of the castle. He closed his eyes wearily and tried to calm his furiously beating heart. He tried to see it as a positive step, Death Eaters would read she was dead, report back to Voldemort and he would forget about her. Kitty's friends and family, such as they were, would be informed and they would not try and find her. He doubted whether they would either way, Kitty had made a habit of disappearing for months even years at a time and he doubted anyone would notice. He wondered if that depressed her.

All at once the desire to see Kitty hit him forcefully; to wrap his arms around her, kiss her, breathe her in. He knew she was perfectly safe but didn't feel like he could ever believe it until he actually saw her. Just hearing her voice would be a comfort.

"Harry!"

He glanced up to see Hermione hurrying over, looking worried.

"Is everything ok? Everyone's waiting for you!"

"Oh, right," he said heavily, clambering to his feet.

"What's wrong?" demanded Hermione, noticing his expression.

He hesitated momentarily, before his shoulders sagged.

"The Order have faked Kitty's death," he said flatly, handing her the newspaper article.

Hermione's eyes widened as she read it before looking over to him, shocked. He tried to rein in his emotions.

“Harry, are you ok?” she asked tentatively.

“Yeah sure, I mean, it’s a really good plan, if you think about it,” he said quickly, hoping to mask his emotions with a bright, sunny voice.

“Doesn’t mean you have to like it?” she suggested, folding the newspapers up and tucking them under her arm, “Are you going to be ok?”

“Course!” Harry said quickly, hating how false he sounded, “Just a bit of a shock...”

“Of course it is,” she said with a sympathetic look, “How’s she taking it?”

Harry glanced at her letter briefly.

“She’s just read her own obituary, how would you feel?”

Hermione grimaced and laid a comforting hand on Harry’s arm.

“No, I’m fine Hermione,” Harry tried, giving a brittle smile, “I just – just really miss her...this just really makes me want to see her again...”

“I know Harry,” she said, with a comforting smile, “this is really hard for you, but doesn’t it make you happy to think maybe You-Know-Who and the Death Eaters think she’s gone?”

“Yeah, of course,” he said with some difficulty, wondering if Hermione would be able to understand, “it’s just...”

“You want to speak to her,” Hermione finished.

He gave a self-deprecating shrug.



“I understand Harry,” she said with a sudden gleam in her eye, “leave it to me alright? I’ll sort something out. Now you better get to Quidditch tryouts – you’re captain remember.”

“What are you going to do?” he asked suspiciously.

“Leave that to me,” she said reassuringly, “now come on, Ron’s waiting for you.”

Harry sighed, tucking the letter and the newspaper clippings into his robes, wondering what Hermione could possibly be planning. He tried not to get his hopes up too high whilst wondering if she really did have the solution to his problem.

Still Life

30th October 1996

This is the hardest story that I've ever told  
No hope, or love, or glory  
Happy endings gone forever more  
I feel as if I'm wasted  
And I'm wastin' every day

Being dead hadn’t really affected the life of Kaitlyn Conner too much. It had drastically affected the life of Catherine Earl of course, who was now six feet under and down officially in police records as murdered – unsolved. The body that was lying in that grave was not hers to state the obvious, rather a transfigured object which had now reverted to its natural state, whatever that was. She hadn’t wanted to find out.

Kaitlyn, Kitty to her friends of which there were few, felt little desire to find out how the news of her death had been taken by those who’d known her. Only her stepfather and stepbrother were left to care now and she doubted they were seriously affected by the news. The only person who’d taken the news badly was her fiancé Harry Potter whom she had last spoken to two weeks ago.

She was currently lying stretched out upon her bed, headphones clamped over her ears, pumping out a heavy, thumping beat and she carefully studied her college work. Their assignment had been 'still life', but she hated pompous titles like that so instead she'd gone down to the pawn shop, bought a battered old pocket watch and was slowly taking it apart with a tiny screwdriver.

The thinking was 'still life' just meant something inanimate, something that didn't work, was stopped. So she was going to arrange all the little cogs and pins of the clock on a board or something. She'd stopped time. Stopped life. Still life.

Bingo.

She knew she'd probably fail the coursework. It was supposed to be a bowl of fruit. It was supposed to be a painting. But she didn't care, she was too distracted to care.

She tried to ignore the niggling, insistent voice in her head that was telling her she was the watch. That she was broken, she was stopped. Ever since the moment Harry had left for that train she felt like she was just going through the motions; wasting time until the moment that train returned. She felt like her life stopped that day.

She was technically dead after all.

Kitty gritted her teeth against the thought and prodded her screwdriver into the carcass of the watch. A spring bounced out and hit her in the forehead. She gave an irritated sigh, leaning over the edge of her bed and scoured the floor for it. Her bedroom at Tonks' place was a decent size but she'd managed to already make it messy, despite the few possessions she actually had. Clothes were strewn about and the walls were covered with sketches and paintings she'd half-finished and got fed up with.

Kitty found the spring and dropped it into a jar, listening to the sounds of Tonks moving about in the kitchen. Remus had not been over for several days now and she got the feeling all was not well with them. She'd definitely heard raised voices and slamming doors from both of

them the last night he was here and Tonks was now looking pale faced and distracted.

As if hearing her thoughts, Kitty glanced up to see Tonks pushing open her bedroom door. Sure enough she had dark circles under her eyes and was still in her work robes, despite being off shift for several hours.

Kitty wrenched off her headphones, excited expression on her face however, she could see the telephone in Tonks' hand.

"It's Harry," she said, handing her the phone.

Kitty grabbed it, flopping onto her bed.

"Harry?" she asked breathlessly.

"Hi Kitty," came his reply at the end of the crackly line, "how are you?"

"I'm fine," she said, unable to stop herself grinning, "just doing my homework - I thought you'd forgotten!"

"Like I'd forget you," he laughed, "you'd probably beat me up! Did you say you're doing homework?"

"Yes!" she replied haughtily.

"I thought you didn't know the meaning of the word?" he replied easily.

"Well if it makes you feel any better I'm doing it wrong - my painting of a bowl of fruit is now a smashed-up watch."

"I'm not even going to ask," Harry said with a grin in his voice, "how college going?"

“Yeah Ok...hate having to force myself to wake up at half seven every morning...”

“Bet you didn’t realise there were two of those in one day?” he laughed.

“God no...but I’m quite enjoying it, keeps me distracted.”

Harry didn’t laugh this time even though she’d said it in a joking manner. She couldn’t have been disguising her mood as well as she thought because he gave a heavy sigh.

“Are you ok Kitty?” he queried, sounding worried, “last time we spoke you were a lot...happier.”

“I’m fine,” she said brightly, smiling widely before she realised he couldn’t see her, “better for speaking to you anyway. Thank god for Hermione and her brains at sorting this phone thing out...”

“She’s a genius,” agreed Harry, pausing for a moment obviously stalling before asking his next question. “So...have you made any friends since we last spoke?”

She gave an internal sigh. Harry seemed permanently worried about apparent inability to develop any friendships with the people she went to college with. She didn’t really care, she couldn’t go out like other people, spending her life either in the house, at college or travelling between the two. She understood it was because she had to be careful, but she was beginning to go crazy always being stuck inside; it was making her get itchy feel and she felt rebellious. She longed to go and do something normal and was working on Tonks at present to let her get an evening job.

Harry didn’t get it anyway, what would she be able to talk to a friend about? She was desperate to talk to somebody, anybody about this magical world she was stuck on the outskirts of. But it wasn’t going to be possible, so she’d decided to just not bother. Who needed friends anyway? She had Harry, sort of.

However, despite not actively seeking out a friendship, she may have developed one accidentally. She remembered her odd encounter during Sculpting class a few days previously.

“Kitty?” came the worried prompt.

“Sorry, just thinking. I er, might have made a new friend actually,” she told him, hoping to allay his fears somewhat.

“Oh yeah?”

“Yeah, she’s a bit strange, even by these arty farty standards,” she laughed, “came up to me in my Sculpting class yesterday and proclaimed bold as brass that she was a witch!”

“What?!” demanded Harry incredulously, panic already lacing his voice, “Why didn’t you tell me about this earlier!? Who is she?”

“Calm down,” she told him, laughing again, “although, you’re reaction was about the same as mine, can you imagine? Ultimate panic. She went on to reassure me that she was a white witch.”

“A white witch?” demanded Harry, “Never heard of them, are they some new group-”

“Let me finish! Apparently a white witch is someone who is a wiccan...she went on to tell me that she believed in the power of words and something about a mother goddess and nature - I was cracking up with relief at this point – she told me I had a vivid aura and that she just had to talk to me!”

“I don’t understand,” Harry said in confusion, “is she a witch or isn’t she?”

“She’s a muggle witch,” Kitty reassured him, apparently there’s a big group of them at college, they all get together and say spells and have interesting names like Astra and Destiny. Completely harmless, a little kooky, but just normal muggles.”

“They say spells?” he asked her incredulously. “Do they work?”

“Of course not! They’re nothing like your spells, they’re all long rhyming verses and seem to involve lots of coloured ribbon.”

“She sounds like a lunatic,” he said and she could tell he was frowning.

“Nah, they’re not. Just hippies,” she said happily, “Harmony said-”

“Harmony?”

“This white witch! She said her mom’s a total hippy, lives in a tree house in the New Forest; apparently it’s a very ancient oak in danger of being cut down. She was brought up in a commune and was actually named Harmony Sunshine River! All the other girls in her little coven are really called Sarah and Jessica and would just kill to be named something so wiccan for real.”

“That is so weird...” Harry said, sounding crossed between bemused and worried, “so does she really think she can do magic?”

“Yup.”

“But she can’t?” he clarified.

“Harry, if they really could do magic, don’t you think I’d be joining up?” she snapped before she had time to censor herself; Harry’s tone was annoying her.

He was silent for a moment and she instantly felt guilty; but not guilty enough to apologise.

“Why do you want to learn magic?” he queried, odd tone to his voice.

“I don’t,” she shrugged, “let’s talk about something else.”

Harry sounded as if he wanted to continue questioning her.

“Aren’t you glad I’ve made a friend?” she asked him pointedly.

“Of course I am, it’s just...she sounds a little bizarre Kitty. Are you sure she’s someone you should be hanging out with?”

“How can you say she’s bizarre?” Kitty challenged, “Can you imagine what she’d do if I explained to her who my fiancé really is?”

“Point taken, who does she think your fiancé is at the moment?”

“Someone at Boarding School,” she suggested, not wanting to tell Harry she hadn’t actually mentioned him to Harmony at all.

No one knew she even had a boyfriend, let alone a fiancé. She only wore her ring when she was at home, the rest of the time it was on a chain around her neck.

“Anyway, I don’t know if we’re actually going to be friends or anything,” she shrugged now, “what would we talk about?”

“Kitty...” he sighed heavily, “I know you have to be careful because of Voldemort and everything, but it doesn’t mean you have to cut yourself off from life altogether. That’s the reason we had to fake your death and everything remember, I hate the thought of you going around not speaking to anybody because you’re too scared...”

“That’s all very well and good to say Harry, you’re safe and sound in Hogwarts. You don’t know what it’s like listening to Remus and Tonks talking about all these terrible things happening, or reading the Daily Prophets stories, or hearing it on the Wizarding Wireless...there’s stuff happening out there...horrible stuff.”

“I know that Kitty,” Harry said heavily, “but you can’t stop living your life because of that...that way He wins...”

“I know that,” she stated, “but I’ve been reading this book about the first war that Remus leant me and-”

“Why are you reading that?” demanded Harry.

“Just want to know what we’re in for...you can’t believe how weird it is for me to read about you in a history book.”

“I don’t think you should be reading stuff like that Kitty,” he said shortly, “you’re just going to get yourself worked up.”

“Well there’s not a lot you can do about it, is there?” she stated challengingly.

He gave a heavy sigh at the end of the line and she softened slightly.

“Sorry...I’ve been in a crap mood all day...”

“No problem,” said Harry distantly.

Again she paused for a moment, thinking about the latest chapter she’d bookmarked.

“You didn’t tell me...” she began hesitantly, wondering whether she should bring this up at all, “you never told me about Halloween.”

“Oh...Well you knew my parents were killed by Voldemort,” he said in a flat voice, obviously instantly knowing what she was referring to.

“Yeah, but I didn’t know that...that it was this famous event...” she said, stalling for a moment, “it’s tomorrow you know...the anniversary.”

“I know.”

“Are you going to...do you do anything special for it?” she asked him softly.



“No,” he said defensively, before audibly relaxing, as if he’d reminded himself who he was speaking to, “I don’t really do anything special, just think about them maybe.”

“Ok,” she said quietly, “I’ll think about them too for you.”

“Thanks,” he said, sounding surprised.

There was a short silence and she guessed they’d exhausted that topic of the conversation. Harry didn’t seem to have anymore to say on the subject of her bedtime reading or her potential new friend so she waited to see if there was anything he did want to speak about.

“So college is ok?” he asked once again.

“Its fine,” she smiled.

“Spoken to Adam lately?”

Kitty paused for a moment, Harry’s voice had sounded light and conversational, but this was definitely a touchy subject. Adam was a guy on her course who fancied her and she’d made the mistake of telling Harry about him. He was convinced something was going to happen without him there.

“Harry,” she replied wearily, “you said you weren’t going to do this...don’t you trust me?”

“I trust you, it’s just him I don’t,” he replied evenly.

Kitty tried to be annoyed but it just wouldn’t happen.

“Well, you should have carried on divination Harry,” she joked, “he tried it on the other day in the common room.”

“What?!”

“Yeah I know,” she sighed, “I had to punch him.”

There was the sound of laughter trying to be held back over the phone line and Kitty grinned, "And that would explain the homework...punishment - I refused to do another detention after Tonks went mad thinking I'd been kidnapped the last time."

Harry really did burst out laughing now and Kitty grinned delightedly, just listening to him. It was nice to be back onto safe topics of conversation.

She rarely got to speak to him and the time apart, after their intense relationship was almost soul destroying. She was even glad to be at college and doing homework, because it kept her busy and her mind off things. She was sure she was purposefully getting detentions and extra work, just to keep herself occupied.

"So, you've got a punishment and all he got was a sore nose?" Harry asked, tutting.

"Give me some credit Harry," she sighed, grin plastered across her face, "I wacked him something chronic - he'll have a broken nose and two black eyes come tomorrow, the horny bastard."

Harry snorted with laughter now and although she knew they were both stalling, it felt nice to talk about something normal, even if it was just for a few moments.

"Can you talk properly yet?" she asked suddenly.

"Oh almost," he said airily.

She always looked forward to the point in the conversation when whoever was with Harry disappeared for while, allowing them to talk about the important things she wasn't supposed to know. Obviously whoever was with him today was lingering around; they were nearly halfway through their allotted time.

"Will you be coming home for Christmas?" she asked, wanting to get as much information out of him from their short conversations.

“I’ll be staying with the Weasley’s,” he said, slight glum tone to his voice as she felt her own heart sink, “but, I know for a fact Mrs. Weasley will let you come over, and I’ll visit all I can over the floo network.”

“Oh, ok...” she said, failing to hide her disappointment, “can’t you stay here, with me?”

“I asked but I’m not allowed,” he sighed heavily.

“Come anyway,” she couldn’t stop herself asking, “give me something to look forward too.”

“Kitty,” said Harry heavily, and she could hear him shifting as if trying to shield someone out of the conversation, “you know I can’t-”

“Yeah, right, forget it,” she cut in irritably, before taking a steadying breath, “I know it’s a stupid idea. I just thought...seeing as it’s Christmas...”

“I know.”

She nodded heavily, the excitement of a few minutes ago completely drained away.

“I miss you Harry,” she admitted quietly.

“I miss you too,” he replied, sounding quite as glum as her now.

There was a brief silence across the line broken only by the background crackling, Kitty guessed that sometimes there wasn’t anything more to say.

“Ok,” Harry said hurriedly, “they’ve gone.”

This was the part of their conversations she relished. This was when Harry told her things he wasn't supposed to, or didn't want to, discuss with anyone else.

"So, what's going on?"

"Malfoy's attacked Katie Bell, a girl from my House. Gave her a cursed necklace to deliver to someone in the castle and she accidentally touched it," he began in a rush, "she's been taken away to St Mungo's hospital..."

"You saw him do it?" she demanded.

"No, he has an alibi apparently," he sneered before giving a noise of frustration, "No one will listen to me! They all just think I'm obsessed!"

"You know you're right Harry, they'll all see it in the end," Kitty promised him, "but you'll need proof if you want them to believe you. Follow him, see where he gets to."

"That's just it! I've been searching for him on the Marauders Map and he's nowhere in the castle! It's like he just vanishes from the place for hours at a time – do you know how frustrating it is being outsmarted by Malfoy?"

Kitty frowned, surprised at how annoyed he sounded.

"Don't let him get to you," she soothed him calmly, "he'll make a mistake – just make sure you're around when he does, but be careful! Now, what about this meeting with Dumbledore, your letter wasn't very clear..."

"Dumbledore took me into his memory, of when he first met Riddle. He was in this grotty orphanage somewhere in London and we just watched him and Dumbledore talking."

Kitty didn't bother asking all the questions that were on the tip of her tongue, like what 'took me into his memory' meant for starters.

“Why’s he showing you that?” she asked in confusion, “I thought he was trying to teach you how to fight him...”

“I guess Dumbledore has his reasons,” Harry said, not sounding like he believed his words at all, “I’m guessing it’s a ‘know your enemy’ type of thing. You never know, it might help.”

She frowned once again, she thought something that would help would be knowing how to fight properly and defend yourself, not what the madman was like as a child.

“What was he like then?” asked Kitty curiously, “Riddle, I mean.”

“Cruel,” said Harry flatly, “and arrogant. Sounds like he was already scaring the other kids around him, massive superiority complex, couldn’t wait to escape the orphanage.”

“Can you blame him?” asked Kitty in a faraway voice, thinking about how ever bad it got with her mom or stepdad, at least she was never that unlucky.

“Not feeling sorry for him are you?” asked Harry.

“No!” she said fiercely, “Of course not.”

“I wouldn’t blame you if you did,” he told her quietly, “I sort of did, after seeing that.”

Again there was a brief silence.

“He deserved it,” Kitty said finally, memory of that night in the graveyard flashing in front of her eyes, “sounds like he was born evil.”

“Maybe,” Harry agreed, before hesitating slightly.

“What is it?” she asked softly.

"I just, can't help but notice...the similarities between us," he said in a rush, she could almost picture him flinching as he awaited her reaction.

"What do you mean?"

"You know, both without parents..." he began awkwardly, "and you should have seen his face when he heard about Hogwarts, it was like a lifeline... and it was the same for me. It just felt like, finally I'd found my real home, my only home..."

He paused for a moment. "Does that sounds really stupid?" he asked flatly.

"No, of course not Harry, I understand..." she said, picking up a piece of her smashed watch and examining it, "that's what I felt when I met you...even when we were holed up in that grotty take-away patching up each other's war wounds. I remember looking you and thinking, I'm home, I'm where I'm supposed to be, finally."

Harry gave laugh, not one of humour but maybe one of recognition. She knew exactly what it meant without being able to interpret it and all at once that feeling of being at home washed over her once more; it was never a physical place for her, it was more a feeling, a state of mind. She only ever felt it when she was with him, and that's what made being kept apart so difficult to bear. She felt like she was homeless, wandering aimlessly and wasting time, like a broken compass with no north.

Kitty wanted to tell him all that in that moment but knew that it was pointless, he already knew it. She couldn't heap anymore worries on his shoulders, she was supposed to be strong for him.

"Kitty," Harry began in a quiet voice, "you know I love you, don't you?"

"Yes," she smiled sadly, tears brimming in her eyes for some unknown reason.

“And I just want you to be happy?”

“Yes.”

“I’m sorry I was horrible about your new friend, and I really don’t mind if you want to read history books...” he told her, “it’s just, I’m worried about you. You sound so quiet now; you don’t laugh like you used to, you sound like you’re just...surviving not living.”

She wanted to tell him everything in that moment; that he was right. That she felt as dead as everyone thought she was, like she couldn’t think of any reason to get out of bed in the morning. She hated waking up, because it meant the longest possible stretch of time before she could fall asleep again and tick off another day. Life just wasn’t worth it right now.

But how could she tell him all that? He’d just worry and stress and probably march right out of Hogwarts and get himself blown up by Death Eaters, or worse. There was nothing he could do about it, so why bother?

“Kitty?”

She tried to sniff surreptitiously, furiously wiping the tears off her cheeks.

“Yeah?” she said in a falsely bright voice

“You’re not ok are you?” he stated.

“I’m fine Harry!” she countered smoothly, “A girls allowed to miss her fiancé a little isn’t she? I’m just adjusting to a new life, it’s normal.”

“See, now I know it’s serious because you haven’t tried your chronic liar voice out on me since the first week we met. What can I do?”

“Harry-“ she began with some difficulty, not knowing how to proceed.

“I’m going to speak to Tonks.”

“She’s got enough of her own worries right now and there’s no need. I’m. Fine!”

“Kitty!”

“Harry,” she growled dangerously, “don’t make this any worse than it all ready is!”

“What do you mean” he began, before his voice subtly changed, “I wonder how we’re going to do at the big Quidditch match next week? It’s Ron’s first game, he’s really nervous.”

The change in topic was so sudden Kitty guessed that their conversation was no longer private.

“Is someone back with you?”

“Yeah.”

She gave a low growl of frustration.

“This is ridiculous, we can’t even talk for more than a few minutes a week and we have to make do with owl letters! I hate being stuck here while you’re off having your life!”

“How do you think it is for me?” he countered, and she could hear him trying to inject some humour back into the conversation, “I’m stuck here thinking of your interesting new life in trendy, arty London, surrounded by other talented people to be normal with?”

They were both silent for a moment and she tried to figure out if she was offended or amused by his comment. After a moment he gave a slight chuckle and she couldn’t help but follow suit.

“Are you really jealous of my ‘normal’ life?” she asked him, grinning slightly.



“Are you really jealous of mine?”

“Touché Potter,” she said, fiddling with her engagement ring unconsciously, “I wish you were here right now, just sitting in my room here, chatting together like any other normal couple.”

“We’ll never be normal” he told her, “but I wish I was with you too.”

Kitty stretched out on her bed, eyes closed as she listened to his voice, trying desperately to imagine that for those few minutes he was sitting there with her and wasn’t about to leave her all over again.

But before too long she heard someone at the other end of the line hurrying Harry up and once again she was forced to make her goodbyes. Every one of them as painful as the last and every one of them just another for the collection, a long line of them stretching indeterminately into the future.

“I love you,” she whispered emotionally.

“I love you too. Take care, I mean it.”

8th December 1996

Dear Kitty,

I hope this letter finds you well. Thanks so much for sending me the painting of Ron and me from the summer, it seems like a million years ago now! I can’t believe it’s only been a few months! I put it up next to my bed and think of you whenever I see it.

How is the course progressing? Harry’s been boasting about your sculpture award every chance he gets, he’s stuck the newspaper cutting you sent in his potions book (he probably wouldn’t tell you that, but I think it’s sweet!). Hope the jobs progressing well too, you sound like you’re keeping yourself busy; trying not to have too much thinking time? Harry tells me it’s the worst possible job you could do, he

reckons you'll spend more time watching the films than actually selling them!

I'm really glad you've managed to arrange to spend Christmas at The Burrow, even if it's just for a few days. I can't wait to see the look on Harry's face when you turn up, he's been unbearable lately, moping about and moaning about you not being able to visit. Best Christmas present he'll ever have I reckon, almost makes me not want to bother with getting him one from me, he won't care!

I've asked Ron to go with me to Professor Slughorn's Christmas party and I think Harry's asking Luna. You'd really like her, she's completely 'mental' as Ron would say but perfectly harmless and lovely. She was with us at the Ministry, the night Sirius died. I think Harry has a bit of a soft spot for her because she gets awfully bullied, but don't worry, he doesn't like her like that! Honestly, I get sick of him talking about you all the time, no offence.

If it's not you he's talking about though it's Malfoy, and the great dastardly plan he imagines he's developing. I'm beginning to get a bit worried about it; it's almost become an obsession. He hates not knowing what Malfoy's up to. Personally I can't see what Malfoy could possibly be doing, we know it wasn't him who was responsible for the cursed locket.

Perhaps you could talk to him, subtly mention that maybe getting so obsessed isn't really good for him? And you know my thoughts on that blasted potions textbook, he's almost as obsessed finding out the identity of the 'Half-Blood Prince' as he is Malfoy's 'plan'. It worries me when he gets obsessive like this, you know Harry, he tends to get a bit hot-headed and impulsive. I wouldn't want him to do anything he'd regret.

Anyway I must sign off, Ginny and I are going to plan our outfits for the party; I sound positively girlie don't I?

Give my love to Remus and Tonks. I can't wait to see you at Christmas, try not to get too down about the wait. We all miss you.

Love Hermione

x

## A Very Weasley Christmas

24th December 1996

Have yourself a merry little Christmas,  
Let your heart be light.  
From now on our troubles will be out of sight.

Faithful friends who are dear to us,  
Gather near to us, once more.  
Through the years we all will be together,  
If the fates allow.

Kaitlyn Conner stared at her reflection intently. Slowly she raised the hairbrush and began to pull it through her now long, damp brown locks with even strokes, hardly paying it any attention. Today was Christmas Eve, people across the world would be settling down for the evening, probably watching an adaptation of A Christmas Carol on TV and diving into the chocolate tin. She could hear carols floating up from the street below and there was the definite frost in the air.

It should have been magical, and it probably was to the rest of the world. But to her Christmas had never been a particularly fun or festive occasion and she could not remember a single one of the holidays she hadn't spent crying or hiding.

Christmas always made her think of her mother.

It seemed like so long ago now, but there was a time where she'd spent Christmas Eve sleeping with various friends. In fact she'd spent most of December with them. Little did she know she'd been in for a shock when she decided to be the better person and return to her mother for Christmas.

That year there was no Christmas for Catherine Earl, only Intensive Care in the local hospital and then the morgue.

There'd been no Christmas for Sarah Elizabeth Earl either.

"Kitty!"

Tonks' head appeared around the doorframe, taking in the messy room and Kitty, still standing in front of the mirror, towel wrapped around her.

"Are you not getting ready yet?" she asked her with a frown, sidling into the room, "Bill will be here in an hour..."

"Just...just trying to decide what to wear," she told Tonks, trying to hide her face from view.

"What's wrong Kitty?" the woman merely asked, dropping onto her bed and fixing her with a piercing look, "Still thinking about your mum?"

Kitty didn't want to agree, but something in her expression must have told Tonks all she wanted to know.

"There's still time to visit the grave, if you want."

"No, I don't want to," she stated flatly.

And she really didn't. She'd put Catherine Earl far behind her and visited that grave for the last time already – there wasn't anything to remember or grieve for now.

"Are you sure Kitty?" asked Tonks softly, "She is your family..."

"Harry's my family now," Kitty said firmly, "and you and Remus of course. I just...don't need to or want to anymore."

Tonks seemed to give this a moment's thought before nodding in acceptance. Kitty continued to study her appearance, brushing and attempting to style her hair in silence.

“You look worried,” stated Tonks, “I thought you’d be happy to finally see Harry?”

“I am...happy...” she nodded firmly, “Just....”

“Nervous?” she guessed.

Kitty gave a shaky laugh, “A little.”

Tonks regarded her silently as she began to brush her hair once more. Despite appearances she was extremely happy at the prospect of seeing Harry again, it had been over four months since they’d parted in the library of Grimmauld Place. She was desperate to see him again, kiss him, feel like he was truly there with her, rather than at the end of a phone or an owl.

Perhaps it was the all pervading gloom that seemed to inhabit her and Tonks’ home now, but even the prospect of seeing Harry again couldn’t lift her from the black cloud she seemed to be settled on, intent to remember the ghosts of the past rather than celebrate the living.

“I think your hair’s brushed now.”

Kitty paused, glancing across at Tonks’ reflection. She was watching her with the similar dulled expression she had steadily inhabited for the past few months. Her continual arguments with Remus had finally got too much to bear and Kitty hadn’t seen him now for some weeks. His gradual disappearance had been marked by the steady decline in Tonks’ mood and appearance.

Her heart was now as sad and dull as her pale face and lank black hair.

Kitty gave a sigh and went and sat on the bed next to Tonks. She took up her hand and held it tightly.

“Come with me to the Weasley’s,” she suggested with an encouraging smile, “Remus might be there, you could talk. It is Christmas after all...”

“No...I think I want to just be alone,” she said, struggling against the tears, “I think we’ve run out of words now.”

“But-”

“-Bill will be here soon to collect you,” she cut in, dropping Kitty’s hand, “you best get ready. Let me do your hair.”

Kitty wondered if she should try to talk to Tonks some more, but she’d known her long enough now to realise that this was no ordinary mood; her friend was deeply depressed and only one person could shake her out of it.

She decided to say no more and instead sat back in silence and allowed her to cast various drying and styling charms over her. She felt her hair shifting into order and smiled at Tonks briefly.

She got up and scoured the room for underwear and clothes, throwing them all into her rucksack. For some reason she’d put off packing for this holiday and deep down she knew it was because she had always expected something to come up or it to be cancelled.

Her dashing about continued until finally she had to choose something to wear. What do you wear when you see your fiancé for the first time in four months? What do people wear for special family Christmas celebrations? She’d never had to face this challenge before.

“Wear your red dress,” Tonks suggested, noticing her look of mild panic, “Harry won’t know what’ll hit him.”

Kitty grinned to herself, agreeing instantly and pulling the dress on, standing in front of the mirror once more. There was a deep booming chime throughout the house and Tonks got up to answer the floo.

“He’s early!” Kitty yelled across the house, running around the room, gathering presents, more clothes and trying to quickly apply her make-up.

Finally she pulled on her long black coat and wrapped a yellow scarf around her neck, glancing around the room one last time before entering the lounge. She found that Bill, far from awaiting her and her bags, was instead hugging a tearful Tonks. He was stroking her hair and shot Kitty an anxious look; maybe Bill wasn’t used to it, but Kitty had grown accustomed to Tonks’ mood swings now.

She merely sat down on the sofa and studied her hands intently, twiddling her engagement ring around her finger slowly, similar black thoughts engulfing her thoughts. She wondered what her mother would say if she were here now and she had met Harry. Would she like him? Would she be proud of her?

Would she care?

I hate Christmas, she thought to herself savagely - what better time to rub it into her face that she had no family, that she had to rely on the kindness of strangers for somewhere to go?

Tonks must have calmed down because she was now striding over to Kitty and pulling her into a bone crushing hug.

“Have a great Christmas Kitty, say hello to Harry and everyone for me...”

“I will,” promised Kitty, “Please take care of yourself?”

Tonks merely nodded, pulling away and helped her with her bags.

“Merry Christmas Kitty!” exclaimed Bill over-exuberantly, obviously attempting to mask the heavy atmosphere, “Ready for another Floo ride?”

“The sooner we get it over and done with the better!” she replied, eyeing the very real looking flames anxiously.

Bill talked her through the motions once again and suddenly she was standing in front of the fire, floo powder falling between her fingers as she swallowed her nerves and excitement.

“The Burrow!”

Travelling by floo was always an ordeal; the roaring sound in the ears, the lack of oxygen, the pressure...It all combined to disorient her and make her feel very rapidly motion sick. And then it would be over, she would stumble out onto an unknown hearth, relish the feel of air in her lungs and gradually her legs would stop shaking.

The lounge of the Burrow was jam packed with sofas, pouffes and coffee tables and was now dominated by the large, real, Christmas tree in the corner. She desperately searched the room for Harry but found only Mr and Mrs Weasley. She greeted them enthusiastically, relishing the almost instant lift of the blackness that had been hanging over her and Tonks' home.

With a sudden noise Bill appeared next to her, stepping out of the flames as if it were a normal doorway and placing her bags on the floor.

“You're early!” said Mrs Weasley happily, already giving Kitty a hug and moving over to Bill.

“I finished work earlier than expected and something told me Kitty wouldn't mind.”

Kitty merely laughed and shared another awkward embrace with Mr Weasley, who was wearing a particularly festive jumper.

“Harry should be out back in the garden,” he informed her, before pointing the way.

She grinned widely and followed his guiding finger, weaving her way out of the lounge, into a similarly ramshackle kitchen before reaching



the back door. She pushed it open and was taken aback as she stepped into a flurry of snowflakes – it was snowing here!

Kitty stepped out into the snow and tilted her face to the sky, breathing in the deep country air. She knew Ron lived somewhere in the West Country, hundreds of miles from where she'd been moments ago. She reached out and caught a snowflake grinning to herself widely before crunching her way across the courtyard to the garden gate.

And then she heard him. He was laughing.

She rounded the corner and saw that Harry and Ron were beyond the garden fence, bundled up against the cold and laughing and joking as they cut branches of holly from the bush in front of them.

She couldn't hear what they were talking about and for a moment she could do nothing but stand and watch him. There he was, safe and sound, just as he'd left her. Kitty couldn't help but feel the tears spring to her eyes and she stepped forward hesitantly, unsure of what to do next.

She was saved of ever having to decide by Ron catching sight of her and nudging Harry. He glanced over his shoulder momentarily before doing a massive double take, shocked face twisting into the widest grin she'd ever seen on his face.

Kitty began to run dodging the bushes and slipping and sliding in the snow until she reached him, throwing her arms around him and leaping into his arms, wrapping her legs around his waist.

She was laughing almost hysterically and bent down to kiss him, relishing the warm press of his lips, the grip of his arms, his smell. The kiss lasted for some time and it was with great reluctance that she parted from him and dropped back to the ground.

“What are you doing here!” he spluttered incredulously, eyes dancing as he seemed to take in very detail of her.

“Surprise!” she laughed, wrapping her arms around his neck and planting another kiss on his lips, “Damn the Death Eaters and evil doers, I decided we needed our first Christmas together!”

Harry laughed exuberantly, still staring at her in obvious shock.

“I can’t believe it’s really you!” he exclaimed, running his fingers through her hair in fascination, “Look at you! Your hair’s so long now! You look so different...”

“What about you?” she said, ruffling his own hair, “Yours is nearly as long as mine! And you got trim, you’ve been working out haven’t you!”

“Quidditch,” he said simply, before holding her at arms length, “Let me see you properly.”

She opened her coat and showed him her dress, spinning around and posing like a model. He gave an appreciative whistle and she bobbed her tongue at him. With a grin he wrapped his arms back around her waist and pulled her closer.

“Even more gorgeous than I remembered,” he murmured, breath tickling her face.

“Merry Christmas Harry,” she whispered, forehead resting against his.

“Merry Christmas Kitty,” he replied in a low voice, bending down to kiss her.

It was the perfect kiss. Four months in the making and saying more than any breathless conversation could. It spoke of separation, longing, happiness.

Promise.

Kitty practically skipped down the stairs that morning, never having felt so happy and excited for it to be Christmas, even as a small child.

Wonderful smells were filtering through the Burrow and as she entered the lounge she was greeted warmly by everybody, who were gathered around the tree drinking sherry.

“Harry!” she exclaimed warmly, rushing over to him, “Merry Christmas!”

He clambered to his feet happily, obviously having been waiting for her to come down. He pulled her into a happy hug and gave her a brief kiss, only to aware the room was full of people.

“Merry Christmas Kitty,” he murmured, eyes lingering on hers for a few moments, trying to convey more than the words could.

When they pulled apart she greeted everyone, unable to wipe the wide grin off her face. She couldn't remember the last time she'd felt so happy and carefree.

“Thank you for my present,” she told him, thinking back to the leather-bound sketchbook and pencil set that was now upstairs on her camp bed, “it's perfect, I'll use it every day.”

“You're welcome. Thank you for mine.”

She had given him a small framed photo of the two of them taken by her friend Donna during the summer when they'd gone out clubbing. It showed her and Harry, grinning to camera in front of a late night takeaway. Kitty loved it because it was muggle, it didn't move and it showed her and Harry in happier times, normal times. Event the fact that she had black eyes and he a slightly swollen jaw, by-products of their fight with her stepdad, couldn't ruin the picture. There was something wonderfully honest about it.

“Thought you'd need something to remember me by.”

“I don't need reminding,” he laughed, “I think about you all the time. But it's perfect.”

Soon both her and Harry were put to work laying the table and they didn't stop talking for almost the entire time, updating each other of their news from their respective lives, happy just to hear the sounds of each others voices.

Everybody was wearing new sweaters when they all sat down for Christmas lunch, and Kitty pulled her dark red one over her dress happily. She'd never been made anything before and she didn't think her own mother had even known what knitting needles were. Mrs Weasley was everything a mother should be she thought to herself as she sat down next to Harry, kind and caring, making things and cooking...

She almost had to pinch herself as she looked around the table, full of people all happy to be spending time with one another. Her new family, she thought to herself with satisfaction, a vast improvement on the earlier model.

She felt a deep sense of peace and happiness wash over her as they began to dish up their Christmas dinner and she looked over to Mrs Weasley with new found affection. She was sporting a brand-new midnight blue witch's hat glittering with what looked like tiny star-like diamonds, and a spectacular golden necklace.

"That's a lovely necklace Mrs Weasley."

"Why thank you Kitty. Fred and George gave it to me! Isn't it beautiful?"

She tilted this way and that so everyone could appreciate both the hat and the necklace.

"Well, we find we appreciate you more and more, Mum, now we're washing our own socks," said George, waving an airy hand.

Kitty laughed and glanced over to Harry, goofy grin on her face.

"Harry, what is that in your hair?" she asked suddenly, noticing something white and wriggling.

She plucked it out, realising with a grimace it was a maggot.

“Why have you got a maggot in your hair?” she asked incredulously.

“Kreachers idea of a Christmas gift,” he explained.

"Ow 'orrible," said Fleur, with an affected little shudder.

"Yes, isn't it?" said Ron, "Gravy, Fleur?"

In his eagerness to help her, he knocked the gravy boat flying; Bill waved his wand and the gravy soared up in the air and returned meekly to the boat.

"You are as bad as zat Tonks," said Fleur to Ron, and Kitty glanced up at her swiftly, "she is always knocking things over."

Kitty felt a swooping sense of anger towards the French girl and shot a look over to Remus. He was silently cutting a potato with a knife; he hadn't even given any sign of recognition at the mention of her name.

"I invited dear Tonks to come along today," Mrs. Weasley was saying, setting down the carrots with unnecessary force and glaring at Fleur, "but she wouldn't come. Have you spoken to her lately, Remus?"

"No, I haven't been in contact with anybody very much," said Remus and Kitty felt her mouth drop open in shock at his callousness, "but Tonks has got her own family to go to, hasn't she?"

“She told me she was spending Christmas alone,” Kitty said pointedly.

Remus' gaze flickered up to her for a moment but he didn't reply. Again she felt a deep sense of anger in her stomach, thinking of how depressed her best friend had been the past few weeks. No wonder she was so upset she thought grimly, if Remus can act so cold and uncaring.

Harry seemed to notice her thoughts because he shot her a questioning look.

‘What’s that all about?’ he mouthed to her.

She merely shook her head, she’d fill him in on her home situation later, she was sure Remus was studying her surreptitiously.

As they turned back to the conversation Mrs Weasley suddenly cried out.

"Arthur!"

Kitty glanced up to see the woman had risen from her chair; her hand was pressed over her heart and she was staring out of the kitchen window.

"Arthur - it's Percy!"

"What?"

Mr. Weasley looked around. Everybody looked quickly at the window; Ginny stood up for a better look. Kitty knew this was Ron’s brother, the one who had been so terrible to Harry and had as far as she was aware, ex-communicated himself from the Weasley family.

Sure enough, as she craned to see through the kitchen window she saw another ginger haired male, striding across the snowy yard, his horn-rimmed glasses glinting in the sunlight. He was not, however, alone.

"Arthur, he's - he's with the Minister!"

And sure enough, the man Kitty had seen in the Daily Prophet almost every morning was following along in Percy's wake, limping slightly, his mane of greying hair and his black cloak flecked with snow.

She shot Harry a panicked look, unsure of what to do; should she hide? Nobody was supposed to know she was even alive, let alone still with Harry. He looked similarly alarmed but before any of them

could say anything, before Mr. and Mrs. Weasley could do more than exchange stunned looks, the back door opened and there stood Percy.

There was a moment's painful silence, then Percy said rather stiffly, "Merry Christmas, Mother."

"Oh, Percy!" said Mrs. Weasley, and she threw herself into his arms.

Rufus Scrimgeour paused in the doorway, leaning on his walking stick and smiling as he observed this affecting scene. Kitty knew there was nothing she could do; trying to slip out now would only cause more attention to be drawn to herself. Instead she tried to inch away from Harry and look unconnected to him and forgettable.

"You must forgive this intrusion," he said, when Mrs. Weasley looked around at him, beaming and wiping her eyes, "Percy and I were in the vicinity, working, you know, and he couldn't resist dropping in and seeing you all."

Kitty almost scoffed out loud, far from a happy family reunion, Percy showed no sign of wanting to greet any of the rest of the family. He stood, poker-straight and awkward-looking, staring over everybody else's heads. Kitty noticed that Mr Weasley, Fred, and George were all observing him, stony-faced. Wands had suddenly appeared on the table and she couldn't help but feel surprised at their stealth.

"Please, come in, sit down, Minister!" fluttered Mrs. Weasley, straightening her hat, "Have a little purkey, or some tooding...I mean-"

"No, no, my dear Molly," said Scrimgeour, darting eyes taking in all the dinner guests, "I don't want to intrude, wouldn't be here at all if Percy hadn't wanted to see you all so badly. . . ."

"Oh, Perce!" said Mrs. Weasley tearfully, reaching up to kiss him.

The man's gaze rested upon Kitty and she felt her stomach give an uncomfortable lurch as she saw his eyes widen in surprise at seeing her. Whether this was because he recognised her or not she didn't know and she purposefully stared at Percy and Mrs Weasley, trying

to look nonchalant. Beneath the table Harry squeezed her hand and if anything, this panicked her more; he was worried too.

". . . We've only looked in for five minutes, so I'll have a stroll around the yard while you catch up with Percy. No, no, I assure you I don't want to butt in! Well, if anybody cared to show me your charming garden . . . Ah, that young man's finished, why doesn't he take a stroll with me?"

The atmosphere around the table changed perceptibly and beneath the table Harry's hand clenched in hers. Everybody looked from Scrimgeour to Harry and Kitty felt as if her heart had stopped beating. Nobody seemed to find Scrimgeour's pretence that he did not know Harry's name convincing, or find it natural that he should be chosen to accompany the Minister around the garden when Ginny, Fleur, and George also had clean plates.

Kitty had stopped breathing some moments ago and fought against her instinct to turn a questioning, panicked look towards Harry.

"Yeah, all right," Harry said into the silence.

She could tell by his expression that he was not fooled; for all Scrimgeour's talk that they had just been in the area, that Percy wanted to look up his family, this must be the real reason that they had come, so that Scrimgeour could speak to Harry alone.

He released her hand and got up and Kitty felt suddenly very exposed. Everyone in the room seemed to be on tenterhooks, Remus had even half-risen out of his chair, looking as if he were about to intervene.

"It's fine," she heard Harry mutter as he passed him.

Kitty thought it was anything but.

"Fine," he added, as Mr. Weasley opened his mouth to speak.



"Wonderful!" said Scrimgeour, standing back to let Harry pass through the door ahead of him, "We'll just take a turn around the garden, and Percy and I'll be off. Carry on, everyone!"

As the door to the garden slammed shut Kitty made to get out of her seat and go to the window to watch but Remus merely shot her a warning look and shaking his head. The silence in the room was palpable and Mrs Weasley tried to fill it as best she could, alternately hugging and gushing to Percy. He however, seemed highly uncomfortable now and was avoiding the glares coming from the rest of his family.

"How have you been Percy, have you been looking after yourself?" she demanded, looking flustered now, "You look as if you're lost weight, doesn't he Arthur?"

Mr Weasley made a non-committal noise in the back of his throat. Meanwhile Ron was rising from his seat, craning to watch Harry in the garden with Scrimgeour. She wondered what the Minister himself would possibly want to talk to Harry about.

Despite her fury at Remus, she felt panicked and anxious and whilst she could sense an argument brewing between the Weasley clan she leant over to him.

"Remus, what should I do, should I go?" she whispered desperately.

"It's too late for that now, he's seen you," he murmured out the corner of his mouth, eyes trained on Percy.

Her heart gave another horrible lurch and her gaze flickered towards the window, she could see Harry leaning against the fence, back towards her.

"What does he want with Harry?" she demanded apprehensively.

"No doubt it would do the Ministry a world of good at the moment to be seen in discussions with 'The Chosen One', he's either trying to recruit Harry or get information out of him."

Still her heart thumped against her ribs and she stared at the two figures in the garden, nibbling a nail. The atmosphere had definitely turned sour in the kitchen however and Kitty managed to tear her eyes from the garden in time to see Ginny throw a parsnip at her erstwhile brother.

Things escalated very rapidly from here on out and Kitty couldn't help but aim a potato at the mans' retreating head as he was hustled out of the kitchen. They all sat where they were as Mrs Weasley alternately sobbed into hands and shouting at her children for driving Percy away. She guessed that every family had their burdens, even at Christmas.

Everyone was silent and the strained atmosphere stretched out until Harry walked back into the kitchen, slamming the door forcefully. She was relieved to see that he looked angry.

He relayed what the Minister had spoken to him about, confirming Remus' suspicions, before his eyes met Kitty's and her heart sank.

"He asked about you Kitty, I don't know how but he knew who you were."

Far from her heart thumping, now it felt like it had stopped and she looked from his face to the others.

"So...what does this mean?" she asked with some difficulty, "He's the Minister right...he can't do anything to me...can he?"

"No, but he could tell the wrong people," said Remus, before looking over to Mr Weasley, "what do you think Arthur, what should we do?"

Kitty had never seen Mr Weasley look so grave, the anger towards his son not quite dissipated yet.

"Finish our dinner. This doesn't change anything, it's Christmas!" he said loudly, "if the Minister knows about Kitty then we'll inform Tonks and make new arrangements. Now eat!"

The festive spirit had definitely gone out of the occasion as everyone finished their dinner in near silence. Even the arrival of the massive Christmas pudding, surrounding in blue flame excited the merest obligatory 'ooh'. She nearly broke her teeth on a large silver coin but couldn't help but feel far from lucky; the words 'new arrangements' were echoing in her head.

Harry gave her a worried smile and squeezed her hand once more.

"Everything's going to be ok."

How Do They Rise Up?

15th April 1997

Phoenix from the Flames  
We will rise together  
They will know our names

It was late evening as Kitty sat on the underground, waiting for her tube to arrive. She had already contacted Tonks twice to allay her worries, but an accident on her line had meant her usual routes were cancelled and she was unwittingly forced out after darkness.

She couldn't remember the last time she'd been out so late and with a slight laugh she looked to her watch and noted it was only 8.30pm. How her life had changed.

With a suspicious look around her, she pulled out a newspaper and began to read. The other muggles waiting for the tube didn't give her a second glance and she carefully shielded her magical paper, the Daily Prophet with a copy of her muggle one, the Daily Express. The reason for the tube accident became immediately obvious; the front page carried a headline about a Death Eater attack on a train full of people, which derailed and killed half the occupants.

She felt bile rising in her throat as she instinctively looked down towards the gaping mouth of the tunnel her tube would take her down. It looked like the jaws of death and she couldn't help but repress a

shudder; she'd been due to ride that tube. If she hadn't forgotten her sketchpad and gone back, she'd be dead.

Now she understood Tonks' anxiety, she obviously knew the real cause of the accident and wasn't trying to worry her, she wondered fleetingly if the attack had been meant for her. It had been several months since the first Death Eaters had got wind of her continued existence and since that time there had been four near misses and she and Tonks had moved house three times.

She knew the time would soon come when she'd have to leave college altogether, but she was clinging on to her last shred of normalcy with every bit of strength she possessed. She'd already quit her job and stopped attending after-school clubs and art shows; the net was tightening now and soon there would be no place to hide.

Suddenly she didn't want to be on the tube, the gaping tunnel seemed to be mocking her and she imagined what it must have felt like for those muggles, did they know they were going to die or did it happen quickly? Did they realise that their death were part of a greater plot, orchestrated by a fanatical group that objected to their very existence?

She felt like she stood on the brink between two worlds; the magical one and the muggle one, involved in both but belonging to neither. All around her people were dying, needlessly, and she could do nothing but watch, wait and react when it was too late.

All at once she wanted to scream and shout out at everyone and everything; to rage against the wizards who put blood above life, to warn the muggles walking towards danger and death, cry out for Harry who was so very far from her and always being pulled further. What they all needed now was hope, and it had been a long time since she'd felt any of that in both the magical and the muggle world.

She gathered her things and left the platform, walking down the almost deserted corridors of the underground labyrinth. She guessed people were staying away because of the 'accident' and she felt a swooping sense of anger, they'd won again hadn't they? Little by little they were infecting everybody with their death and destruction.

She allowed herself a moment to dwell on what the feeling would be like if the war was all over, if they won and not the Death Eaters. Long ago she'd decided she'd feel like a phoenix, rising from the ashes when everything around her was burning. They'd all rise up, build something better than had gone before and nobody would let history repeat itself, not this time.

She realised she'd almost slowed to a standstill, furious thoughts still echoing around her head, mingling with the screams she imagined from the trainload of people. And all at once she felt like she wouldn't hold it all in, she'd let it out in the only way she knew how.

She dropped her backpack and rummaged around, pulling out her small spray cans she'd been using for her latest project. With glances around to check the coast was clear, she set to work, all the while humming.

It didn't take long, five minutes perhaps. A few people gave her glances, other stopped her and demanded to know what she was doing, but she'd been able to lie before she could tell the truth and they'd all left her alone; perhaps they'd seen the glint in her eye, usually possessed by the religious and fanatics.

She knew the phrase 'writing on the wall' was one that was supposed to mean a portent of doom, but she also knew that when all around you the world crumbles and people are too scared to speak up, the wall is the only place left. Graffiti was almost always a nuisance, but sometimes it was the only outlet for the undercurrent. If you want to know that state of people hearts, read the writing on the wall.

She stepped back from her piece and examined it for a moment. The screaming in her mind had abated slightly and she felt able to pick up her backpack and move on. If she didn't make it home soon Tonks would probably have a heart attack and she'd miss Harry's phonecall.

As she walked down the corridor, blending in with the muggles, all that was left behind was the large phoenix emblazoned on the wall, rising from flames and ash and the scrawl below.

We will rise up together.

The White Tomb

31st June 1997

It doesn't matter what I want,

It doesn't matter what I need,

If you've made up your mind to go,

I won't beg you to stay.

“It's nearly time,” came a voice from the front of the Great Hall.

Harry, Hermione and Ron looked up at the table at the head of the hall as the professors rose. The room was heavy with silence and Harry felt like there wasn't anything he could say, so he merely shared a look with the others as they climbed to their feet.

“ Please follow your Heads of House out onto the grounds. Gryffindor's, after me.”

They filed out from behind their benches in near silence. Harry glimpsed Slughorn at the head of the Slytherin column, wearing magnificent long emerald-green robes embroidered with silver. He had never seen Professor Sprout, Head of the Hufflepuffs, looking so clean; there was not a single patch on her hat, and when they reached the Entrance Hall, they found Madam Pince standing beside Filch, she in a thick black veil that fell to her knees, he in an ancient black suit and tie reeking of mothballs.

Beside them stood Remus and Tonks, he in a grey-black formal looking robe and her in her Auror robes and sporting vivid pink hair. But that was not what Harry was staring at, it was the tall girl standing beside her, wearing flared black trousers and a white shirt.

“Harry!” she exclaimed, striding through the mass of students filing out towards the doors to the Entrance Hall.

“Kitty,” he breathed in relief as she threw her arms around him, burying her face into his shoulder.

“You ok?” she whispered in a gravelly voice, running her fingers through his hair and examining his face intently.

He nodded his head wordlessly, there was nothing more he could say.

“You?” he asked.

She also nodded without a word and Harry closed his eyes and tried to let go of everything for just a moment - Hogwarts, Snape, Dumbledore...

“You shouldn’t be here,” he told her in a torturous voice, “if people see you...”

“Let them,” she replied fiercely and he saw her eyes were already red rimmed.

“Potter,” came a reprimanding voice.

They broke apart and Harry saw Professor McGonagall beckoning him back in line but despite her harsh tone, her heart didn’t seem to be in it.

“Come on,” he said in a dull voice, “let’s do this.”

He slipped his hand into hers and they rejoined the ranks of the filing students, ignoring the curious glances sent their way. They were heading, as Harry saw when he stepped out on to the stone steps from the front doors, towards the lake. The warmth of the sun caressed his face and he looked up for a moment and let it shine down on him. He felt Kitty give his hand a reassuring squeeze as they found their seats amidst the sea of chairs that faced the marble table.

It was the most beautiful summers day.

People were whispering to each other; it sounded like a breeze in the grass, but the birdsong was louder by far. The crowd began to swell and Harry gazed around the extraordinary assortment of people unseeingly. Beside him, Kitty stared fixedly at the white table.

With a great rush of affection for both of them, Harry saw Neville being helped into a seat by Luna and Ginny. They alone of all the DA had responded to Hermione's summons the night that Dumbledore had died.

Harry watched as notable figures from the magical community filed into the front rows of seats, looking grave and dignified. He wondered whether any of them were really sorry that Dumbledore was dead. But then he heard music, strange otherworldly music. He and Kitty both looked around for the source of it before seeing them in the clear green sunlit water, inches below the surface. The Merpeople's song made the hair on Harry's neck stand up and yet it wasn't unpleasant. It spoke very clearly of loss and despair. As he looked down into the wild faces of the singers he had a feeling that they, at least, were sorry for Dumbledore's passing.

He impulsively reached out for Kitty's hand and she gripped it tightly, breath hitching slightly as they both caught sight of Hagrid. He was walking slowly up the aisle between the chairs. He was crying quite silently, his face gleaming with tears, and in his arms, wrapped in purple velvet spangled with golden stars, was what Harry knew to be Dumbledore's body. Ron looked white and shocked. Tears were falling thick and fast into both Kitty and Hermione's laps.

The funeral seemed to pass in a blur of faces and noises to Harry. All he could think of was being stuck on top of that tower, unable to move, unable to save Dumbledore. Of Snape, glaring at his mentor with such a hate and fury. And then, without warning, it swept over him, the dreadful truth, more completely and undeniably than it had until now. Dumbledore was dead, gone...he clutched the cold locket in his hand so tightly that it hurt, but he couldn't prevent the tears spilling from his eyes. Kitty doubled the fierce grip on his hand but Harry could not respond.



He saw very clearly as he sat there under the hot sun how people who cared about him had stood in front of him, one by one, his mother, his father, his godfather and now Dumbledore, all determined to protect him; but now that was over. He could not let anybody else stand between him and Voldemort; he must abandon for ever the illusion he ought to have lost at the age of one: that the shelter of a parent's arms meant that nothing could hurt him. There was no waking from his nightmare, no comforting whisper in the dark that he was safe really, that it was all in his imagination; the last and greatest of his protectors had died and he was more alone than he ever had been before.

He looked at Kitty, Ron and Hermione. Ron's face was screwed up as though the sunlight was blinding him. Hermione's face was glazed with tears, but Kitty was no longer crying. She met Harry's gaze with a fierce, fear filled look and he knew that at that moment they understood each other perfectly, and that when he told her what he was going to do now, she would be expecting it, dreading it even, but would understand.

People were beginning to climb to their feet and leave the chairs but Harry and Kitty remained. He felt like he couldn't breathe and stared at the white tomb for some time.

"Ok I'm ready," she said finally.

His heart thumped painfully against his ribs, of everything he'd felt today, this was the worst, the very lowest moment.

"Say it."

He didn't reply, falling back into his old habit of intertwining his fingers with hers, playing with her engagement ring.

"Harry..." she began, reaching up and turning his face to her, "Say it."

He stared into her bloodshot eyes, the usual twinkling blue dulled and saddened. Suddenly he realised what he was giving up. He could hardly bear it.

“I promised you that I’d love you forever,” he began with some difficulty, “I promised that I’d be with you for the rest of my life, no matter how long or short it was going to be.”

“It’s going to be long,” she told him fiercely, “you’re going to come back to me, in the end.”

“I will,” he promised her, “but until that day, I need to know that you’ll be safe. I can’t lose you.”

“But I can lose you?” she asked, suddenly angry, “Maybe I can help you?”

“Kitty-” Harry began sadly.

“-No, I know,” she cut in, shaking her head now, “there’s nothing I can do. I promise I’ll keep myself safe, if you do.”

“I will.”

“There will be a future?” she prompted him.

“There will be a future,” he agreed.

She nodded quickly, turning away from him and regarding the lake once more. He gave a sigh and reached up, smoothing her hair down, trying to memorise every detail of it. The tears were falling down her cheeks once more, this time from a very different sort of grief and he pulled her into a fierce embrace.

“So is this it?” she whispered fearfully.

“There’s Bill and Fleur’s wedding, remember?” he told her.

“Yeah, we wouldn’t want to miss that.”

AN/ Another mammoth chapter sorry, I can't seem to stop myself writing about them! I may also have told a small white lie, there are two more chpaters to come not one. The final chapter Days in Our Lives: Year Seven and the Epilogue: Lightning Bolt Archives.

Hope you enjoyed?

## Chapter Thirty Four

### Days In Our Lives: Year Seven

Just because everything's changing  
Doesn't mean it's never been this way before  
All you can do is try to know who your friends are  
As you head off to the war

Pick a star on the dark horizon  
And follow the light  
You'll come back when it's over  
No need to say goodbye

### The Wedding

1st August 1997

This was it. The last day. The time had finally come.

Ever since that day on the lake's edge at Dumbledore's funeral, when Harry had finally admitted he was leaving, off to find the Horcruxes, Kitty had felt like she'd been living under a dark cloud. The days had steadily been ticking down to the wedding and already she'd had to face the awful fear of knowing Harry was in danger and only being able to wait. Already he'd been attacked by Death Eaters and Moody had been killed as result; George had lost an ear for goodness sake!

And now the final day had come. After this he'd be gone, for how long she couldn't know. And if she couldn't stop him leaving then she'd have to satisfy herself by making his last day with her the one he'd look back on, remember fondly and smile about.

"Kitty!"

The yell echoed down the corridors of her latest home and with a start, Kitty was jolted from her thoughts. She was standing in front of a cracked mirror, hairbrush still hovering over her head as she attempted to instil some order to her appearance.

“I’m coming!”

She smoothed down her long, gold dress and applied the finishing touches to her makeup. She smoothed the lip gloss on and embraced the butterflies in her stomach, impossibly excited at the prospect of seeing Harry again, despite the circumstances.

“Kitty!”

This was a yell of exasperation, as if this were a well practised routine.

“Coming Tonks!” she repeated, dashing around the room frantically, “Do you have my shawl-thing?”

“It’s here!” Remus’ voice floated from the front room.

Kitty bent down, secured her overly high heels and picked up her present. There done. In record time too, well almost she thought to herself ruefully as she entered the small living room and saw Tonks tapping her feet, Remus beside her.

“All set,” she proclaimed to them excitedly, “are we going or what?”

Tonks rolled her eyes but couldn’t be angry, her eyes were dancing with excitement too and she looked flushed and radiant. Kitty knew why, her best friend had told her the previous night, she was going to be a mother.

“We’re going by floo,” Tonks told her, hair turning into a blonde bob as she spoke, “now before we leave, have you got your emergency Portkey?”

Kitty merely motioned to the locket around her neck. One press of the photo inside it and she’d be instantly transported to the next safe house. Currently it was a bedsit in Coventry; luckily she’d never had to use it. She kept a photo of Harry in there for good luck.

“Good,” Tonks said happily, eyes flickering down to the bracelet on Kitty’s wrist, her ‘walkie talkie’, “right! So we’re all set. If there’s any

trouble you just get out of these ASAP right? No stopping to look for Harry or us ok?"

"We've been through all this already," interrupted Kitty impatiently, "I promise I'll be a good girl, now can we go?"

"I'm serious Kitty," Tonks said, as Remus stood silently beside her, "It's getting pretty bad at the Ministry now, there's no telling what could happen. So if anything does go wrong and it looks like trouble, don't stop, just go. Harry can protect himself, you can't."

Kitty bit back her retort, knowing Tonks was only trying to protect her but feeling stung by her words; like she couldn't protect herself! She secretly smiled at the reassuring weight of her stepfather's gun, which was nestled in her clutch purse next to her lip gloss and mobile.

"I'm sure Kitty wouldn't want to put herself in harms way," Remus said finally, taking Tonks' elbow, "shall we go?"

Kitty watched them closely, Remus had only known about his imminent fatherhood for only a matter of hours and she wondered how he'd taken it. She could never be entirely sure with Remus, but he didn't look happy. Far from it, in fact when Tonks had turned her back his face fell into lines of misery. Kitty stared at him in surprise and when he caught sight of her, he threw her a swift smile.

Before she had time to decide what this meant he was stepping into the flames, shouting 'The Burrow' clearly. Tonks stared at the flames where he'd once been for a moment before turning to her with a bright smile.

"You ready?"

Kitty nodded, stepping up to the flames, before pausing and turning to her friend.

"So you told him?" she tested cautiously.

“This morning,” Tonks said, wide grin spreading across her lips as if she couldn’t contain her joy.

“How’d he take it?” probed Kitty, wondering if she was wrong in her suspicions.

“He was thrilled,” laughed Tonks, and Kitty knew at once she was lying.

“Really?” she queried, arching her eyebrows.

Tonks must have sensed Kitty’s scepticism because she hitched another smile onto her face, “I think he’s still in shock...”

“Is that what it is?” she asked, “Because to me he looks miserable.”

“I don’t want to talk about it now,” said Tonks suddenly, looking upset now, “you better head on.”

Kitty had no choice but to step into the flames and endure the awful ordeal of travelling by floo. However, it was worth it to stumble out onto the hearth rug of The Burrow. She let her eyes feast on the comforting sight, taking in every spotless detail and remembering fondly her first family Christmas last year. One step closer to Harry.

Remus was there waiting for her, face an artfully constructed expression of peace and happiness. A return smile to him didn’t come easily and for a moment she couldn’t help but let her disappointment and anger at him show. Tonks was her best friend and had given up almost everything to be with Remus, yet he seemed to repay her by continuously pushing her away and punishing himself.

“Kitty?” he queried, looking puzzled at her expression.

“You ought to treat her better,” she said simply, already walking past him, “both of them.”

She left him gaping after her and wandered out into the garden, making for the large marquee. She desperately scanned the

assembled witches and wizards for Harry's familiar black hair, suddenly feeling overtly muggle in her dress; everyone else was in robe-like costumes. She couldn't be too worried however, already in her mind's eye she was practising her greeting for Harry, what she'd say, what she'd do, blushing slightly at her vivid imagination.

As she approached the mouth of the marquee a slightly barrel-chested, ginger haired figure appeared clutching a floor plan.

She figured it was a Weasley and gave him the briefest of smiles, still set on scanning for Harry. The figure however hurried right over to her, massive grin on his face, attempting to pull her into a decidedly romantic embrace. She dodged underneath his arms and took a few hasty steps backwards.

"What do you think you're doing buddy?" she exclaimed angrily.

He looked hurt for a moment, before laughing happily.

"It's me!" he exclaimed, spreading his arms widely before leaning forwards and whispering conspiratorially, "Harry!"

Kitty couldn't help it; she gasped out loud and took another hasty step backwards.

"What?"

"Sssh!" he said insistently, looking around him anxiously, "It's me Kitty. I'm in disguise for the day."

"Disguise..." she repeated faintly, trying to convey that 'disguise' was a poor choice of words, "What happened to your face?"

"Potion," he explained simply.

Kitty stared at the unknown figure in front of her. Now she listened to him speak she could hear Harry in there, but it just wasn't him, it didn't feel right.



She'd been waiting so long for this day, their one last celebration before it would all begin and now it was ruined by magic. Such was the sudden swooping sense of bitter disappointment that she felt the sting of potential tears behind her eyes.

"Don't worry," he pleaded with her, obviously noting her reaction, "I know it's weird but it's just in case, you understand don't you..."

"Wotcher," said a familiar voice behind them, "Arthur said you were the one with curly hair."

Kitty looked at Remus and Tonks, unable to hide the hurt and disappointment on her face and unwilling to let 'Harry' see. Remus showed no trace of her previous words affecting him however and allowed the ginger figure to lead them into the marquee. She paused for a moment having to almost force one foot after another to follow them.

She felt as if Harry had already gone.

Slowly she trailed after them, oscillating between swallowing down the bitter disappointment and feeling angry at herself for caring. She hadn't seen Harry since that terrible day at the edge of the Lake at Hogwarts when she'd watched her pops, the great wizard Dumbledore, laid to rest. She'd sat there, tears still stinging her eyes as she waited for Harry to say what she'd always dreaded, and known, would come. That he was leaving her. That he had a quest. That she couldn't be part of his life until that quest was over, one way or another.

After she was seated the ginger haired figure left to go back to the front of the marquee, shooting her a worried look. She tried to smile back but what came out couldn't even be described as a grimace. Kitty understood that some things just came part and parcel in being with Harry Potter and one of these things was that she would always be left behind to wait.

Perhaps she hadn't really understood this until now. This could be the last time she ever saw him and he didn't even look like him. The

realisation of this hit her like a physical slap – he was going to leave, soon. No more putting it off, no more endless waiting for the word to come. She guessed he felt like she did, that if she stayed any longer she'd never be able to leave.

These thoughts continued to swirl around in her mind as the marquee filled, half familiar faces dotted about. Tonks was forcing the conversation between herself and Remus, almost talking for the two of them.

They'd been married less than a month.

She remembered the small ceremony fondly, she'd been maid of honour and the only guest. It seemed like a lifetime ago now and she mused on why it was always so difficult for them. She'd hoped a baby would be enough of a demonstration of Tonks' devotion to him, to them, but it had seemed to drive another wedge between them.

Kitty gave an inaudible sigh and watched in disheartened silence as the bizarrely dressed, and sometimes looking, people mingled, waving vaguely to Hagrid at the back. Then suddenly a sense of jittery anticipation filled the warm tent and the general murmuring was broken by occasional laughter.

The Harry imposter slid into the row of chairs in front of Kitty, sandwiched between Ron and Hermione. She noted they didn't have to change their faces to be present. He twisted around just as the music struck up and flashed her an anxious, tentative smile. She returned it as best she could, trying to pull her own expression into a believable one.

Mr and Mrs Weasley strolled up the aisle, smiling and waving at the relatives. A moment later Bill and his brother stood up at the front, both wearing black robes and white roses in their buttonholes. Kitty had forgotten how mangled Bill's face had become after the attack at Hogwarts; the wounds were healed but the terrible scars remained. Her eyes travelled to the row of her friends in front of her, lingering for a long moment on George's missing ear.

She felt sick in her heart.

Despite the dark thoughts bouncing off the walls of her mind, even she could not fail to sigh appreciatively as Bill's fiancée walked up the aisle with her beaming father. Fleur was wearing a very simple white dress and seemed to be emitting a strong, silvery glow. Kitty recalled what Tonks had told her about the Veela.

The ceremony passed in a beautiful blur and Kitty tried to stop her imagination running away from her, imagining herself standing at the head of an aisle, Harry standing beside her, waiting to make good on the promise hidden inside the ring on her finger. When this war was over, he'd promised her, on the first years anniversary they'd be married. She truly believed that.

Maybe even now she didn't quite believe he was leaving.

When the ceremony was over, she clapped along with everyone as the shower of silver stars swirled around the couple, the balloons popped and birds of paradise flitted about. She clapped as well as the dance floor appeared and the newlyweds began their first dance.

She'd been expecting it, but still jumped slightly when the ginger headed figure strode towards her and invited her to dance. She smiled nervously and allowed him to lead her out, wrapping an arm around her waist and pulling her closely, fingers intertwining with hers. They slowly moved around the dance floor and Kitty wracked her brains for something to say.

"Nice ceremony," she tried finally.

"Yeah, it was," he agreed and she could feel him studying her intently, "You look beautiful by the way."

"Thank you."

They moved past Mr and Mrs Weasley, who both looked blissfully happy. Kitty focussed on them, watching them for far longer than was necessary, flicking her glance from them to the unfamiliar brown eyes of Harry and then away again.

“It feels like I haven’t seen you for years,” he said in a low voice, breath tickling her face, “I’ve missed you.”

Kitty was very aware of his arm wrapped around her waist, fingers trailing across her skin and making her tingle in the way only Harry could. She couldn’t stop herself tensing slightly in his arms.

“Kitty?” he asked quietly.

He bent towards her as if to kiss her and without any command needed from her brain she pulled away from him. He stood for a moment, staring at her silently before reaching out and taking her hands and pulling her back towards him a little rougher than necessary.

“What is it?” he demanded now and she could hardly bear to look at him.

“This feels wrong,” she said, squirming out of his embrace, fighting slightly against his grip.

“Why?” he asked, hurt clear in the unfamiliar voice.

“Let me go,” she said unhappily, “this is wrong...”

After a long moment he released her and without another breath she spun on her heel and hurried off the dance floor. She made her way outside, breathing in deep gulps of fresh air, pulling her hair away from her face, why did she just feel like she’d escaped?

She felt the presence of someone behind her and she closed her eyes wearily.

“Tell me this is because of the way I look today, and nothing else,” said the voice with forced calm; even his accent was different.

She took another deep breath.

“I’ve been waiting two months to see you,” she told the air in front of her, “two months!”

“I know, I’ve been waiting too,” he reminded her, “so what’s the problem?”

“What’s the problem?” she demanded incredulously, spinning to face him now, “Who the hell am I speaking to? You’re a stranger!”

“Because I look a little different?” he asked, anger flashing in the brown eyes, “I’m still me...you’re over-reacting.”

“Over-reacting!” she exclaimed, bordering on the hysterical, “You have got no idea how little I am under-reacting to this Harry!”

“Sssh,” he said hastily, glancing around him at the mention of his name.

She pushed her lips together, glancing down and taking more steady breaths.

“I’m sorry...but this could be the last time I see you...” she told the ground, tears swimming in front of her eyes, “for months...and months...you’re...you’re supposed to be Harry.”

“I am,” he told her forcefully, not sounding as angry now.

“My Harry,” she corrected him, watching as the tears mingled with her mascara and fell as ugly black drops.

“I am,” he repeated, tentative hands reaching forward and taking her arms, “please Kitty, don’t do this to me now...”

She allowed him to pull her into a tight embrace, repeating in her head that it was Harry, to close her eyes and pretend, just for now.

“I need you to be strong...” he whispered in her ear.

That was the trouble though. She didn't feel strong. Far from it. She'd been alternating between looking forward to, and dreading, this day for so long that her emotions were everywhere. Harry's perfect disguise was just the final nail in the coffin.

"I'm trying..." she managed.

She was unable to shake the absurd feeling that she was cheating on Harry and a sudden horrible realisation had occurred to her.

"That day at Pops' funeral...you weren't just telling me you were leaving were you," she whispered in a horrified voice, "you were breaking up with me...You don't think you're going to make it..."

There was a pause just a millisecond too long, giving away everything.

"No Kitty...I wasn't breaking up with you," he said in a heavy voice, "we're engaged remember?"

"But you don't think you're going to make it?" she demanded in a high, unnatural voice.

Again, the pause.

"You can't leave thinking you're going to die," she wept, "Harry don't go, don't do this."

"I have to."

"No you don't! You don't have to do anything! Stay with me!"

"I love you Kitty, but I have to do this," he tried to explain, brown eyes searching hers, "you understand that don't you? I have to do this."

"No...No..." she cried, becoming hysterical now, "Stay...for me."

“I can’t.”

“Stay!”

“No.”

“Why not? Why won’t you stay for me? Why won’t you stay with me?” the words were tumbling out of her mouth before she had time to censor or check them, “If you really loved me you wouldn’t leave!”

“If you really loved me you wouldn’t ask me to stay!” he retorted, “You’d understand!”

Kitty stared incomprehensively at him, mouthing wordlessly. She couldn’t deal with this, the pain, the very thought of it was tearing at her heart. Why didn’t he feel that? Why didn’t he want to stay with her, spare her from this heart-crushing loneliness.

“Kitty, you can’t ask me to do this for you, because you know there’s no way I can.”

“No...you’d rather be with Riddle than with me!” she hissed, choking on her words now.

“Do you really think that?” he asked her in an icy-calm voice, “You honestly think I wouldn’t rather be spending every second with you? You know I can’t stop now. Dumbledore left me this task, and I’m the only one who can do it. There is no choice.”

“There’s always a choice! Life is all about choices! You’re making the wrong one!”

“You know that’s not true Kitty,” Harry said pleadingly, gripping her arms tightly, “you know that, don’t you?”

She knew she was being incredibly selfish and cruel, torturing him in their last few hours together, but she couldn’t help it. All at once the enormity of it all had bore down upon her; the thought of waiting at

home while her soul mate walked into certain death was too much to bear.

“How can you do this to me?” she spluttered, grasping the unfamiliar figures robes, “How...You’re supposed to love me, protect me...you’re killing me...”

When she looked back at this moment in the long months following, she would always feel the familiar burning of shame in her cheeks. She could hardly stand the thought of what she’d said to him, and in a way it had been made all the worse by him just standing there, not fighting back, but comforting her.

How scared had he been then, she wondered to herself in the deep dark of the night. How disgraceful that he should have been comforting her and not vice versa.

She replayed the scene in her minds eyes a million times, remembering the way he just gathered her up into his arms and hugged her weeping figure tightly, unable to provide any answer to her hurtful demands.

All he’d said was ‘I’m sorry’ in a whisper.

She hadn’t comforted him.

She hadn’t apologised.

She just wept for herself.

\*

The sun was beginning to dip below the horizon now and Kitty watched it turning blood red and fading from sight. She was sat on the bank of the small stream running past the Weasley’s garden, shoes abandoned beside her, chin balanced on her knees.

She knew she should have been in the marquee, spending her last few hours with Harry, but in a way she felt like he’d already gone.



There was no denying the arrival of the war now, she half wanted to slip away and forgo the pain of the last goodbye.

Besides, whenever things got tough for Kaitlyn Connor, she always reverted to what she knew best, even if it was a Catherine Earl response. When it came to fight or flight, she invariably chose flight, and here she was, running away from her problems once again.

She hated herself for that.

A noise behind her made her jump and a moment later Hermione came into view. She dropped down onto the bank beside her, steadying two glasses of champagne.

“Harry sent me to find you,” she said, holding out one of the glasses to her, “although he told me not to tell you that.”

Kitty gave a flicker of a smile and took the glass. Hermione sipped her own and dropped her beaded bag to the floor; it made a suspicious clanging noise. Kitty stared at it thoughtfully before looking over to Hermione.

“What’s in there, supplies?” she guessed.

“Yes,” nodded Hermione, unfastening the clasp and showing her the contents.

“It’s bigger on the inside?” Kitty added, noticing how oddly the light looked, as if peering through a tiny cave mouth into a massive cavern beyond.

“Yes,” Hermione repeated, “we’ve got everything I can think of, camping equipment, cooking things, clothes, books...”

“Sounds like a jolly holiday, have fun,” said Kitty bitterly, before flinching at the sound of her own voice, “I’m sorry, that was uncalled for.”

“Don’t worry, I understand Kitty,” she said sympathetically, “you’re upset, you don’t want him to leave.”

Kitty knew this was a given and didn’t reply, merely watching the water eddying around the stones in the stream and sipping her champagne mechanically.

“I’m sorry Harry doesn’t look right,” said Hermione, “I know how much you were looking forward to seeing him.”

“Doesn’t matter,” said Kitty in a faraway voice, “it can’t be helped, I understand.”

“I don’t think you do,” she said quietly.

“Excuse me?” Kitty demanded loudly.

“If you understand, then what are you doing out here, wasting your last few hours?” she asked her simply.

Kitty didn’t answer the question straight away, draining the glass instead and dropping it on the grass.

“Because I can’t say goodbye.”

Hermione gave a sad smile of understanding.

“Then don’t?” she suggested, “Just...pretend it’s not...”

“I can’t do that.”

Kitty swallowed and dragged her eyes away from the stream.

“I want to go with you Hermione,” said Kitty suddenly, turning to the girl, “I might not be magical but I could help...I could cook food, be a lookout...help you in the muggle world?”

“Kitty...” began Hermione awkwardly, “it’s not...it wouldn’t be practical.”

“Why not?”

“Because you’d distract Harry, you know you would...” she said, looking very much as if she were expecting to be struck, “the task in front of us, well it’s massive and dangerous and I don’t know where it’s going to take us. Harry needs to know that you’ll be safe, he wouldn’t be able to cope if you got hurt, or worse.”

“But I could if it were him in pain, or worse?”

“I didn’t say that,” she said sadly, “look at it this way. Harry needs something to fight for. He needs to know there is something worth living for. When it gets tough, it’s going to be you that he thinks about, you that gives him strength. You won’t be able to do that if you’re hurt, or worse.”

Kitty nodded heavily. All this she knew of course, deep down in her heart, but it made her feel better to hear somebody else say it, although she felt a terrible sense of responsibility. Like keeping herself alive would be all that would be keeping Harry alive.

“And he can’t protect both you and himself,” she added softly.

Kitty drew in a shuddering breath, unable to stop the terrible thought that this would be the last time she ever saw him enter her mind. She began to cry; she couldn’t help it, she’d been on and off for hours now and now her emotions had finally getting the better of her. Hermione wordlessly wrapped an arm around her, holding onto her tightly.

“Please be careful,” she cried.

“We will be.”

“And please Hermione...I’m relying on you...please look after him for me,” Kitty managed to whisper fiercely.

“I will,” she promised.

“If anything happens to him,” she began, glaring over to the girl now, “I’ll hold you responsible...I will hunt you down, do you understand?”

“Yes,” she replied, sounding a little shocked at her words.

Kitty nodded once more, desperately trying to brush away the treacherous tears.

“Now why don’t you stop moping out here and go and be with him?” demanded Hermione, “You’ve not got long, make the most of it.”

Kitty nodded heavily, clambering to her feet and marching her towards the marquee.

“Beside, Ron’s Auntie Muriel has cornered him for the past half hour and he looks like he needs rescuing.”

\*

It was only an hour later that it happened. She has been lingering near the buffet table, ladling another glass of punch for her and Harry, dawdling and watching the dancers.

Then suddenly, something large and silver came falling through the canopy over the dance floor. Graceful and gleaming, the lynx landed lightly in the middle of the astonished dancers. Heads turned, as those nearest it froze, absurdly, mid-dance. She recognised it as a patronus, it had that same shimmering, ethereal quality as Harry’s and she smiled faintly, wondering whose it was.

Then the patronus’s mouth opened wide and it spoke in the loud, deep, slow voice of Kingsley Shacklebolt.

“The Ministry has fallen. Scrimgeour is dead. They are coming.”

Kitty heart froze, glasses tumbling from her fingers and shattering on the wooden floor. Those nearest the cat were already drawing their

wands and many people were only just realising that something strange had happened; heads were still turning towards the patronus as it vanished. Silence spread outwards in cold ripples from the place it had landed. Then somebody screamed.

Icy horror flooded her veins as the words echoed around her head.

They are coming...

All around her guests were sprinting, some disappearing with loud pops, others shouting incomprehensively.

Harry.

She was shaken into action, running into the melee of the crowds towards the last place she'd seen him. This couldn't be it, this couldn't be the last time she saw him, she hadn't said goodbye properly.

"Ron! Ron, where are you?"

Hermione's voice screeched off to her side and she pushed her way through the screaming people towards it. Cracking noises filled the air and suddenly she could see black cloaks and masks within the brightly dressed crowd.

"Harry!" Kitty called, half sobbing as she was buffeted by the terrified guests.

She barely had time to duck as a streak of light zipped past her ear.

"Kitty!"

It was Tonks' voice but she ignored it, she needed to get to Harry, she had to see him one last time, she had to apologise for her earlier mood. They couldn't be parted with only bad memories of their last few hours.

"Harry!" she screamed.

With a sudden crack a black-robed figure appeared ahead, wand already raised against her. She stumbled to a halt, mind strangely blank.

The mask shouted something and Kitty barely had time to flinch.

“Protego!”

There was a deep clanging sound like a stone hitting a brass bell and she looked to the side to see Remus standing beside her, directing what looked like a shield of light between her and the Death Eater.

“Kitty – get out of here now!” he shouted, grabbing hold of her wrist, “Use your Portkey.”

“No! Harry!” she cried, trying to pull out of his grasp.

Then she saw him.

Hand in hand with Hermione, scanning the crowd desperately, looking for her. She tried to go to him, seeing Ron suddenly appearing by his side and catching Hermione’s free hand.

“Harry!” she yelled frantically.

He didn’t hear her.

He turned on the spot, disappearing with a crack.

“No...” she whispered in horror, trying once more to drag herself out of Remus’ grasp and make it to the spot where he’d vanished, “NO! NO! HARRY!”

“Protego!”

Kitty screamed and raged against Remus, fighting tooth and claw for him to release her so that she could plunge into the deadly crowd. He gripped her tightly, dragging her backwards, and shouting spells as her world fell apart.

Then Tonks was upon her and Kitty could do nothing but scream and weep, not caring now if the masked figures got her. Her friend reached down for her locket, hasty fingers flicking it open and exposing the smiling photo of Harry.

“GO NOW KITTY!”

Her shaking fingers followed the command without engaging the brain and pressed the photo. She felt a sudden tug behind her navel and her feet left the ground, the rushing air pulling her away from the screaming and sobbing, before throwing her suddenly and unexpectedly onto a rough wooden floor.

She didn't move from where she lay, desperate fingers clawing at the ground as she howled with her grief. Harry was gone, she'd never see him again and their last day together had been wasted because of her paranoia.

The pain felt like her soul being ripped apart.

The war had begun.

Diary of a Young Girl

17th September 1997

The day the war came to her door had started as any other for Kitty. She'd risen early, dressed for college and left her latest home, throwing a goodbye over her shoulder towards Tonks.

The day had been average, she'd had first lesson History of Art followed by Sculpture, in which she made good progress on her end of term piece. At lunch time she had gone to the kilns to check on the progress of a commission she was working on then eaten in the canteen with her friend Harmony. They discussed the relative merits of the latest movie heart throbs, went outside for a cigarette before browsing the college bookshop.

She'd never been a big reader but her limited social life meant she now had plenty of time to keep herself occupied. Long nights alone in wherever she was living stretched out before her and the only way she could calm the pain in her soul was to read and escape. For just a few hours a night she was a normal girl, with the whole world at her fingertips, able to walk where she wanted and speak to whomever she wanted. Even if it was only in her mind.

Harmony was chattering away to her but she blocked out her friends voice, today was not a good day. The papers had held horrible stories that morning and Tonks had informed her that the Dementors were swarming.

No one had heard anything about or from Harry for two months.

She tried to banish the painful thoughts and focussed back on the bookshelves, searching for an escape. It was then that she came across the book that changed her life and would be her only friend during the dark months ahead.

It caught her eye as she browsed the bookshelves because of the cover, which showed a black and white photograph of a teenage girl. She was smiling happily in the picture and had sent a shiver down Kitty's spine; as if it were a picture of a lost friend, long forgotten. She picked it up and stared at the title, 'Diary of a Young Girl', before reading the blurb on the back.

In Amsterdam, in the summer of 1942, the Nazis forced teenager Anne Frank and her family into hiding. For over two years, they lived in a 'secret annexe', fearing discovery. All that time, Anne kept a diary. An intimate record of tension and struggle, adolescence and confinement, anger and heartbreak.

She couldn't have known then that very soon Anne's fate would become her own, that already agents of the Dark Lord were massing on her home, awaiting her arrival.

As she stared at the photo on the front cover she felt a deep connection springing to life, as if this long forgotten friend had suddenly come back into her life when she needed them the most.



She didn't make the link right at that moment, but in the later months she'd muse on the feeling and how it had felt exactly the same as meeting Harry for the first time on that bus in Surrey.

Like the one person in the world who could truly help you, save you, had appeared at your hour of greatest need.

She opened it cautiously, turning to the first page. The words jumped off the page at her. She'd nearly dropped the book in surprise, for there written on the first page was her name.

Dear Kitty,

I hope I will be able to confide everything to you, as I have never been able to confide in anyone, and I hope you will be a great source of comfort and support.

Aware that she had not breathed for several long moments, she let out a shaky breath and looked around the bookshop quickly. No one seemed to feel the earth shifting beneath their feet as she did.

"Hey Kaitlyn," called a voice.

Head snapping up she saw Harmony motioning to her watch, they were late.

Kitty stared down at the page once more, closing it slowly, as if slamming it would damage the words. Mind whirring, she hurried over to the counter and paid for the book and rushed through the corridors with Harmony. They were only five minutes late and were instructed to set up easels and get to work.

She couldn't concentrate all through the lesson, mind wondering constantly to the diary addressed to her. Several times she had to stop herself leaving class and finding somewhere quiet to begin reading. It felt just like having a long-awaited letter from Harry in her pocket and not being able to open it. Not that she'd had any letters from him, she had almost forgotten that feeling now; the thrill of seeing Hedwig swoop down, or seeing his familiar scrawl, of reading new words in an old familiar voice. Nothing for two months...

The longest two months in her life.

As these thoughts swirled around in her mind it took a long time to realise something was amiss. It was only when the crystal necklace around her neck began to heat up that she realised someone had been trying to contact her urgently. The paintbrush she'd been holding clattered to the floor as she pressed her hand against the necklace, already instinctively knowing what it meant.

“Kaitlyn, you ok?”

She glanced across at Harmony and gave what she hoped was a convincing smile.

“Er yeah...listen, I'm gonna head off, cover for me?”

Heart hammering madly she packed her bag, all the while Harmony demanded to know what was going on.

“Tell you some other time,” she said hurriedly.

“Wha-“

“Goodbye,” Kitty cut in, hoping to convey everything in that one word of what Harmony's friendship meant to her, “thanks...for everything.”

Taking her bag and coat with her, Kitty hurried through the corridors and locked herself in a toilet stall. She tried to figure out what to do – was it safe to contact Tonks or would that just draw further attention to her? She'd been banned from making unnecessary communications for some months now, they all had, and after a long moments indecision she decided she needed instructions more than anything. She raised her wrist to her mouth, pressing the crystal and whispering in a trembling voice to the ether.

“Tell me...”

They've come for us. Don't go back to the house, they're waiting.

Horror pulsed through her body and she stared unseeingly at the toilet door; the time had finally come. She'd been warned, she'd known it was coming, they'd been expecting it for weeks. She'd almost cursed them for taking such a long time to do it, making them wait in this terrible limbo for the moment when they'd strike. Yet for all the certainty of knowledge that her and Tonks' time was numbered, it had still come as a surprise and a shock.

She couldn't speak, her heart was now in her throat and she could feel the terrified tears prickling in her eyes.

"What do I do?" she asked.

They're coming for you. Meet me outside. Don't talk to anyone. Hide until you see me.

The connection was cut; communications were monitored now and there was no way of knowing whether Death Eaters had too been privy to their conversation. She raised her hands to her head, clutching at her hair as she tried to steady her breathing, expecting at any moment the crack of someone apparating nearby, the blinding light of a curse, the growl of spells being thrown.

It was the longest two minutes of her life, she could do nothing but stand in the toilet stall, eyes closed, listening to the thrumming of the air conditioning and thumping of her heart, wondering if this was it. And then after taking in a calming breath she unlocked the door and ran.

Ran as if they were behind her already, willing her legs to pump faster and harder as she flew through the corridors, throwing herself through doors and all the time listening, expecting...

She burst out of the building, senses heightened as she desperately searched the college green for a robe, a face, any sign that Tonks had been beaten to reach her. Seeing nothing she hurried over to the low wall against which bicycles were chained and squeezed between it and the hedge.

As she sat in the dirt she thought of Harry, wondering how long it would take him to find out if she was caught, what he'd do when he did. The horrible thought occurred to her that maybe they knew where she was because they already had Harry. This was too terrible to entertain and she shook her head, banishing it.

It was the waiting which was the worst thing, worse than the choking fear, worse than the expectation, it was the long drawn out death rattle of every second.

She tried not to think about who would reach her first, Tonks or the Death Eaters. She didn't know what was scarier, those she'd met in the graveyard, masked and anonymous, or those that had the full might of the Ministry behind them, official and overt. Even the thought that they were in a busy muggle space couldn't save her, she'd read enough Daily Prophet reports to know they no longer cared about working in shadow.

Where are you?

The voice was a whisper but to Kitty it was a yell and she jumped half out of her skin. Twisting around she peered through the hedge, seeing Tonks, pale faced as running towards her as if the very hounds of hell were at her heels.

Kitty scrambled out of her hiding place, ignoring the tearing fingers of the hedge and she staggered onto the lawn. It was only then she realised what Tonks' attention was focussed on and she saw them; three robed figures moving swiftly towards her, wands already raised.

With a yell she darted into action, jumping down the steps three at a time, first curse whizzing past her ear with a sizzling sound. She cried out once more, darting and ducking as she ran towards Tonks, who also had her wand out, blasting spells past her.

A second curse zipped past her left cheek, so close to touching that she felt the heat of it scald her skin, the surprise throwing her off balance.

She stumbled sideways, a mistake that probably saved her life as a jet of green light flew past right where she'd been running.

"Not now," she hissed to herself, willing her legs to work harder, "Not yet...not like this...move..."

She could hear their pounding footsteps behind her, see Tonks ahead, shouting something. But noise and time seemed to be working oddly, all she could hear was the sound of her own breath and heart, all she could see were the curses flying around her, leaving deep scores in the grass ahead. Her run across the lawns towards Tonks seemed to take an age.

The curse that finally got her caught her shoulder, and she screamed out as she felt her arm explode in agony. She stumbled, bowling into the arms of Tonks who grabbed her roughly and without a word, spun on the spot.

Still screaming in pain Kitty briefly saw the robed figures only metres behind her before the world began to spin away. The journey was blur, as apparation always was, before her feet slammed into the ground. She stumbled forwards, crashing to the floor and crying out, grasping her arm.

"Inside! Inside!" Tonks was yelling, practically dragging her forwards across the grass.

And then she was bundled through the doors and found herself lying on a cold tiled floor, Tonks working in silence as she ripped her shirt and examined her arm, muttering charms. There was another figure there now, crouching down beside her, looking anxious.

"Get help Remus!"

\*

That was two months ago.

Kitty's arm had healed as much as it was going to but was still slightly stiff and now sported a long ugly red curse scar. Remus told her she'd have it for the rest of her life now. The house she'd been taken to was another of Tonks' many hideouts and that day on the college green had been the last time she'd walked in the free air, been safe.

They could never return to their home now or retrieve any of their possessions and so the small bedsit, which was in the centre of a large northern city, became her prison. It was a good one, they were hidden inside the mass of muggles now and magic, which had for over a year become a regular fixture of her home life, was banned.

In the outside world things were turning bad. Worse even than she could have possibly imagined in those months leading up to the inevitable. The downfall of the Ministry had been swift and complete. Suddenly the usual unhelpful but well-meaning pamphlets the Ministry offered had changed; now they portrayed muggle-borns and half-bloods as dangerous contaminants to the purity of magical blood.

She had flicked through the few which Remus had brought home with him once with a feeling of building dread, hands shaking as she read the terrifying diatribe dressed up as nature notes. The worst thing about it all was that from afar she could see exactly what was happening and where it would end, but most of the wizards seemed confused and unsure. Voldemort had yet to reveal himself, his dirty work was done by his minions through scare tactics and no one seemed ready to stand against them. Amazingly, some people were still claiming he hadn't returned.

Now the newspapers held stories about inquisitions and The Muggle-born Registration Committee. Tonks' father had already gone into hiding after refusing to sign the register. Tonks was worried sick about him and would disappear for days at a time and Kitty wondered if she was looking for him. She scanned the newspapers restlessly for news of him or Harry and the others to no avail.

But then again, no news was good news.

For nearly half a year now the Death Eaters had known she was still at large and not dead as the Order had tried to lead them to believe.

She had seen the articles in the newspapers about her, the wanted signs. The people sent to capture her at college were only the start of her troubles, now in every paper was a photo of Harry, Undesirable Number 1, and a list of associates below, a photo of every friend Kitty had in the magical world. The reward from her capture was so large it was strangely flattering.

College was a distant dream, and she couldn't believe how many months she'd spent feeling sorry for herself while she was there, moaning and moping about how little freedom she had. What she wouldn't give now to just walk into class, dawdle on the way home, ride the tube, eat lunch in a cafe. Did such things still exist? Did the world just carry on without her, unaware of her disappearance?

Now she very rarely left the house and would only do so under the strictest of orders to get what she needed and return. She felt no desire to disobey the orders, gangs of Death Eaters and Snatchers roamed the streets now and although she couldn't see them, she could feel the effects of the Dementors close by.

Contact with the magical world was kept to a bare minimum, Tonks had recently been listed as Wanted and her pregnancy with the child of a werewolf had not gone unnoticed. The thought that either her or Remus could be snatched from her at any moment, was more than she could bear. They were all she had left.

Soon she lost the desire to go out at all, too worried when she did by the feeling of being followed, or watched; knowing that her capture would ruin everything. She knew about the Horcruxes and although she never planned on telling anyone, she didn't know how strong she'd be under torture.

Now spent her time alternately drawing, daydreaming and hiding in her room; reading. The only things she'd had in her bag the day she'd gone into hiding was her sketchbooks, her pencils and the book she'd bought on her last day of muggle life. She devoured it, immersing herself in the girl's world, scared at how similar their lives were.

The diary writer, a young girl called Anne Frank, had been locked away in a small hideaway, hunted by her own people just because

she was different, because her blood wasn't pure. She worried for her friends and her family on the outside and she spoke a lot about the war.

Anne became her best friend and she spoke to Kitty through the pages to such an extent that Kitty was almost convinced the book was written only for her. As if this girl, 55 years ago had imagined Kitty was there and spoke to her.

And it was written only for Kitty in a way, every entry was spoken directly to her. She knew deep down that the 'Kitty' the diary was addressed to wasn't her, but it didn't matter. All that mattered was that for a short time she could imagine she had a friend to confide in, just as Anne did in her diary. When she read the diary she forgot everything, just for a while. She could put her fear out of her mind, her desperate desire to see Harry, protect him, share in his task.

She felt as if Anne read her mind, as if she was the only person who'd ever felt what she was feeling during those long days and nights in hiding. The author knew what it was like to hide away, knowing that every noise outside could be the people coming for her but not only that, she knew what it was like to feel like a caged animal, scared and alone.

"Outside, you don't hear a single bird, and a deathly, oppressive silence hangs over the house and clings to me as if it were going to drag me into the deepest regions of the underworld.... I wander from room to room, climb up and down the stairs and feel like a songbird whose wings have been ripped off and who keeps hurling itself against the bars of its dark cage."

\*

It was strange, but being stuck indoors for weeks at a time gave you a strange perspective on the world. Now it seemed very far away, almost disjointed from her and her new unorthodox family. Remus came and went, bringing with him news of the outside world and dark tales of death and discrimination.



Tonks' stomach swelled and she began to do less and less for the Order until finally she was as housebound as Kitty. She spent most of her time painting or sketching as Tonks lay stretched out on the sofa, usually balancing a plate of food on her bump, listening to music or reading. It was an oddly domestic scene, tainted only by their topics of conversation, which almost always focussed on the war.

Meanwhile she painted. Kitty was glad to have something to occupy her mind. There was something wonderfully distracting about having to concentrate on holding a complicated pattern in her mind's eye; sketching, mixing paints, getting involved in the tiniest of details...hours could pass in what seemed a blink of an eye as she painted, there wasn't even any room in her mind for Harry at these times.

On one such day however, he was suddenly right at the forefront of her mind. Remus was making tea for them both as she worked on a painting of a bustling carnival she'd been working on for several days.

"Kitty," began Remus, stirring several spoons of sugar into a cup of tea for Tonks, "I found out something today you might be interested in."

"Oh yeah?" she inquired vaguely, peering carefully at the picture.

She had the horrible suspicion she'd mucked up the shadow she'd just spent half an hour working on. It was way too blurry.

"Well, you know that I visited Bill and Fleur this morning?"

"Mmm," she nodded, picking up Tonks' silver potions knife and cutting the very tips of the bristles of her brush, hoping to sharpen up the edges.

"They had a guest staying with them."

"Yeah? Who?" she asked, not really interested at all.

"Ron."

The knife she was using slipped, slicing open her thumb. With a gasp she clenched her other hand around it, but stared at Remus, ignoring the pain and the warm blood trickling between her fingers.

“And...and Harry was with him?” she whispered, daring not to hope although her heart was already speeding up and thumping excitedly.

“No, he was alone,” Remus said, looking alarmed at her injury and pulling out his wand.

She merely held out her hand silently, all the while staring at him as she tried to construct a logical question. The excitement had now turned to dread.

“Why?” she managed to blurt out, “Why aren’t they together? What’s happened to Harry?”

“Apparently they had some sort of an argument. Ron stormed out and immediately ran into a band of Snatchers. By the time he’d escaped and had got back to Harry and Hermione’s hiding place, they’d left.”

“But...but...” she tried, before making a supreme effort to reign in her emotions, “Did Ron say how Harry is? Where he is? What they’re doing? Has he done what he set out to do?”

“He wouldn’t give me any details,” Remus said evenly, although a look of anger flashed through his eyes momentarily, “but he sounds safe and well...Kitty, I know that Harry has told you about the task Dumbledore left him, if only you’d-”

“I won’t tell you what it is Remus,” she said shortly, turning away and beginning to pace the kitchen, “you know I won’t, you’ve asked me this a million times before! It was Harry’s mistake to tell me, if Riddle knew what I knew, he’d be making double efforts to find me.”

“He’s making effort enough already Kitty.”

She detected a certain something in his tone, confirming what she'd long suspected; Remus disliked her close proximity to Tonks and his unborn child, she was a dangerous target and she knew he must resent her for it.

"I need to go and speak to Ron," she said finally.

"That's not possible."

"Please Remus!" she begged, forgoing all attempts at self control, "I need to speak to him, I need to know Harry is ok."

"Ron said he is, he won't tell you any different," he told her firmly, "You know we can't risk you travelling; there are Snatchers, Death Eaters and all sorts out on the streets and you're a number one target. One false move and You-Know-Who himself would probably be there to welcome you personally."

"But-"

"No," he cut in forcefully, "you know it's not possible, I'm sorry."

Kitty stared at him for a few moments before snorting in anger and throwing her paintbrushes to the floor. They clattered loudly in the silent flat but the noise wasn't enough, she wanted to break something, scream and shout...

She attempted to calm her breathing, feeling the injustice of it all welling up, the horrible feeling of being a prisoner in her own home.

"What's going on?" came a sleepy voice.

Tonks padded into the room, wrapped in a dressing gown and looking as if she'd been risen from sleep against her will.

"Ron is at Shell Cottage!" Kitty informed her

"Is he now?" asked Tonks, eyes lighting up with interest.

“And Remus won’t let me go and see him,” she elaborated.

“Well, I’d agree with that, it’s far too risky, to both yourself and Bill and Fleur.”

“But-” she spluttered in outrage.

“It’s Ron Kitty, not Harry,” Tonks said kindly, flopping down onto the sofa and fixing her friend with a calculating look, “seeing him won’t bring you any closer to Harry.”

Kitty mouthed wordlessly for a moment, annoyed at both of them but knowing Tonks had read her correctly, any connection with Harry, no matter how tenuous, was what she wanted right at that moment. Finally she gave a huff and fell into the opposite sofa, arms crossed tightly and looking mutinous.

“Why is Ron there?” Tonks asked Remus curiously.

He explained about the argument and the Snatchers for a second time around and this time the right questions sprang to Kitty’s mind.

“He abandoned them?” Kitty demanded loudly, “He just upped and left Harry and Hermione to it?”

“I’m not sure about the details...” Remus began, “Ron was understandably reticent to talk about it, but he seems terribly embarrassed and upset about it all. He’s hiding there now, no one else can know he’s there, even his family.”

She couldn’t shake the need to go and speak to Ron. He’d tell her what was going on, if they’d found any Horcruxes, how Harry was. She could shout at him for abandoning Harry and it would make her feel better. Perhaps, if he was planning to return to Harry and Hermione, he’d take her with him.

“I know that expression Kaitlyn Connor,” said Tonks suddenly, looking severe, “and the answer is no. It’s too dangerous for you to

go there, you know it is. Don't put Harry in danger because you've got cabin fever."

"I wasn't-" she began hotly but Tonks raised her hand to silence her.

"I know exactly what you're thinking. You are not to go there, do you understand me? No sneaking off, no sending owls or letters – anything! One false move, and You-Know-Who would be on that cottage in a shot."

"But-"

"I said no!" Tonks repeated loudly, "Don't make me take magical precautions to stop you contacting him, because I will! I'm trusting you to act responsibly but I can and will wipe your memory if you put one toe out of line."

Kitty glowered at Tonks, feeling too angry and patronised to even reply. After a moment she jumped to her feet and strode out of the room, kicking over her easel as she went. She stormed into her room, slamming the door as loudly as possible and pacing backwards and forwards in a fury.

"Don't you EVER threaten me again!" she yelled at the door, fists balled and trembling with rage.

It was one thing to point out the dangers of the situation, but it was quite another to threaten her with magic, something against which she'd never be able to protect herself. She felt betrayed and hurt by Tonks' words and she flopped down onto the floor, drawing her knees up to her chin.

Kitty drew in a shaky breath and imagined she was far away from the flat, the war and the whole magical world. She dreamed of the ignorance she once held, back when Harry was just a lonely and sad guy she met on the bus and needed her to look after him.

How the tables had turned, except this time, there was nobody to save her, nobody to take her away from her nightmare.

\*

Suddenly it was Christmas Eve.

She hadn't even realised, the days all seemed to blend into one another ever since she'd fled college and London. Her only marker for the passage of time had been the arrival of the daily newspaper but now she ignored it, too scared and sickened by what she read. Then it had been restlessly scanning the wireless for the daily Potterwatch, but even that dried up due to raids and others going into hiding.

She'd only realised it was nearly Christmas when Tonks had suggested she help her stuff a turkey. Kitty hadn't wanted to, she found that the more time she spent alone, the more she hated company and wished to be left alone. But her best friend had looked so sad and lost, standing in the small kitchen with a swollen stomach and a frozen bird in her hand, that she couldn't say no.

They worked mostly in silence, they'd long since ran out of things to say. Everything had changed now; Tonks' threat of wiping her memory had become a black cloud neither of them could walk out from under. She wanted to forget about it, but they were both unable to do or say anything to makes amends. Kitty didn't have the energy anymore.

After a half hearted toast of sherry, they gave up the charade and went their separate ways.

That evening, when all the rest of the world would be settling down to watch TV and eat sweets she locked herself in her room and continued to read the Diary of Anne Frank. For the first time she couldn't lose herself in the words, couldn't escape the horrible little voice in her mind, whispering that she had now heard nothing of Harry for nearly five months.

She wondered where he was right at that moment and whether he realised it was Christmas Eve or was thinking about her. She remembered their last Christmas together the previous year, tucked

up cosily in The Burrow like one big family; her one and only family Christmas. She wondered what she'd be doing this time next year, whether she'd still be alive, still in hiding, whether Harry would be with her and this terrible living nightmare would be over.

She put down the book, unable to escape her thoughts any longer. She allowed herself five minutes to dwell on Harry and stare at the photograph in the locket, trying to imagine what she'd say to him if he was there now. Her mind however was strangely blank; she felt like she'd forgotten how to speak properly and if she saw Harry now, she'd probably not even be able to say anything.

When the five minutes were up she didn't go back to reading the book, instead she looked around her cramped room and sought out her leather-bound sketchpad, a Christmas present from Harry the previous year. She picked up a pencil and flipped it over to a new page. She sucked the tip of it for a second and thought of him.

Dear Anne,

I hope I will be able to confide everything to you, as you have with me, and I hope you will be a great source of comfort and support.

I am so scared.

I am scared that I will always be as alone as I feel now. I am scared in case they find Harry, or Tonks or my friends. I am scared of what they'll do to me if they find me.

I think I'm going mad, I can't feel anything except pain and fear. I feel as if I trapped in a room and screaming at the top of my lungs but nobody can hear me. I need to get out, I need to see Harry, I have to know that he's ok, but I'm too terrified to leave. I wouldn't last ten minutes in the world out there, but I need to help.

I promise if I'm alive at the end of this that the people behind this evil will pay for what they've done and the world will have to beg for forgiveness for what they have allowed to happen. All this fighting and death and destruction for what? For blood? It shouldn't matter if

you're pure-blood, half-blood or muggle-born, why can't people see that?

We'll make them see that.

20th March 1998

Kitty thought it was extremely unfair that there were 24 hours in the day, and that due to insomnia she had to suffer almost all of them. All she wanted to do was sleep until it was all over but her body and her brain was keeping her awake. Torturing her at every moment.

She was lying on her bed in exactly the same position as she flopped down onto it, arms spread eagled as she stared at the damp patch on the ceiling. Not very much was going through her mind and what little coherent chains of thought that were occurring were circling around familiar topics, Harry, Harry, Harry...

“KITTY!”

The yell jolted her from her daydream and she sat bolt upright, heart hammering. It was Remus' voice and he sounded either furious or terrified, it was so hard to tell. She scrambled across the bed, pulling out her stepfathers gun from the bedside table and raised it to point at the door. She waited for further developments, they had a number of code words which could be used to convey messages of danger quickly, she prayed he wasn't about to follow his yell with any one of them.

“KITTY!” he shouted again, “Get out here! Now!”

That wasn't a shout of danger, that was the shout of an angry adult about the scold a small child for getting grass stains on their trousers or leaving the kitchen in a mess. She edged cautiously off the bed however, not entirely convinced the coast was clear. As she moved through her door and into the lounge she saw Remus waiting for her, arms crossed and a look of anger on his face.



“Was the shouting really necessary?” she demanded, trying to calm her heart down.

“In the circumstances, yes!” he replied loudly, eyes flicking down to the gun in her hand.

With a shrug she clicked the safety lock and placed it on the kitchen table. She was about to prompt Remus to explain himself when Tonks walked into the room, looking sleepy, cranky and heavily pregnant.

“What’s all this shouting for?” she demanded drowsily, glancing between the two of them, “It’s six in the morning!”

“It’s nearly seven actually, today’s Daily Prophet has just been printed,” Remus said, throwing his rumpled copy onto the coffee table.

Instinctively both Kitty and Tonks craned to look at the front page, dreading what they’d see. It seemed to be the usual story about traitors within the ‘wizarding community’ and undesirables stirring up trouble.

“What’s going on Remus?” demanded Tonks, “You’re frightening us.”

Remus however ignored Tonks, rounding on Kitty and piercing her with a fierce look.

“Where did you go the other night?”

Kitty felt her insides freeze and tried desperately to appear aloof.

“What do you mean, where did I go?” she asked him carefully, “I was here, like I am every night – every day!”

“You were here?” he pressed.

“Yes!”

“All night?”

“Yes!”

“Remus, what’s this about-” began Tonks in confusion.

“She’s lying, that’s what this is about,” he said, pacing backwards and forwards now, “she’s been leaving the house at night, when you’re asleep. Going off when there are Snatchers and Death Eaters out hunting for her, putting herself in danger – putting you in danger!”

“She wouldn’t leave the house,” scoffed Tonks, looking as if even the very suggestion of it was ludicrous, before turning to Kitty, “would you?”

“Of course not-” she began quickly.

“Stop LYING!” shouted Remus, causing them both to jump.

“Remus!” Tonks said in a shocked voice, “What’s got into you? If she says she hasn’t left, she hasn’t left.”

“Oh but she has left, and do you know how I know she’s been off on secret trysts?” he demanded wildly, diving for the newspaper, “Because one of her little murals has appeared on a street not three miles from here!”

He pulled it open and there in glorious technicolour was a photograph of one of Kitty’s paintings, a large lightning bolt stretching out across a road. There was no denying it was wasn’t hers either, the style, let alone the choice of graphics, was distinctly her own.

“What...” demanded Tonks in a disbelieving tone as she snatched the paper from Remus’ hands, “but she wouldn’t...”

Kitty hopped from foot to foot anxiously, twisting her hands in front of her. They knew she was lying and there wasn’t anything she could do to stop them looking at her with such anger...such disappointment...

“You wouldn’t, would you?” Tonks asked, gazing over at her now.

“I’m sorry,” Kitty whispered.

“Why would you do that?” she demanded in a louder voice, clambering to her feet, “Why would you do that, put yourself in danger...draw that thing...”

“That thing as you put it, isn’t meant for you!” Kitty retorted, riled instantly by her tone.

“What, you think Harry is just going to happen to wander through here and see it?” she asked incredulously, “Your love letter is a giant beacon for anybody to see, you might as well have painted one on the side of our house! Are you trying to get us killed!”

Kitty stumbled backwards at her shouts, unable to decide whether to feel furious or guilty at her words.

“It’s...it’s not a love letter,” she tried, slight hint of desperation entering her voice, “it’s supposed to help people...show them there’s something worth fighting for...”

“Very admirable,” Remus said sarcastically, “meanwhile we’re left with the problem that you painted it here, by us, which means every spare Death Eater is going to swarming this place like flies looking for you! For us!”

“I’m only trying to help...Please don’t stop me from doing this, I need to do something, I need to help...”

“Do you think doodling pictures on walls is helping?” demanded Remus incredulously.

“It’s not doodling!” yelled Kitty, pacing across the floor sharply as she tried to control her anger, “It’s supposed to be a...a symbol...a sign of hope! It’s for the resistance!”

“And how is that possibly supposed to help defeat You-Know-Who?”

“Well how are we helping, stuck here! Hiding like frightened kids, not doing anything except waiting for Harry to have sorted everything out?” she shrieked, “At least I’m doing something, unlike you!”

“You think I’m not doing anything?” Remus asked in a dangerously low voice.

“No, I don’t think you are! At least I’m trying to help, in the only way I can, and you can’t stop me! I can’t hide away like this anymore, it’s driving me crazy being stuck inside day after day! I have to go outside otherwise I’m going to go mad, do you understand me?”

“So my wife and my unborn child are supposed to be put in mortal danger because you’ve got cabin fever?”

“Don’t pretend like you suddenly care! How long are you sticking around this time before you decide to dump Tonks and run off again? You’re forgetting that unlike you, I’ve stuck by her through everything!”

“Excuse me?” Remus practically roared, “You dare to-”

“ENOUGH!”

He stopped instantly and both he and Kitty turned to Tonks who was glaring at the two of them, looking flushed and angry.

“Enough!” she repeated, “Remus, you’re not helping, I will deal with this and Kitty, don’t presume that you know anything about us.”

“But-” they both protested in unison.

“No! Enough!” she yelled, “You’re both acting like squabbling children! Kitty, you have to stop doing this, I know you’re trying to help but you are going to get yourself killed, or worse, and you’ll drag

us down too. I need to be able to trust you to protect yourself and us, and if I can't trust you, then we're going to have to make new arrangements."

"New arrangements?" Kitty whispered, panic squeezing her chest, "You're going to throw me out just because-"

"You see, that's your problem Kitty, it's not a case of 'just because'! Don't make it sound like we're over-reacting! Do I need to go over how many people have been killed this week alone before you realise that we are in the middle of a war?!"

"I know!" Kitty was trembling with emotion now, "You think I don't realise that? Harry is out there, with god knows what happening to him and all I can do is sit at home like a good little girl and watch the death toll rise! So I know we're at war, I'm constantly reminded of it! I've become a prisoner in my own home because of it!"

"And I'm not doing this because it makes me feel better, I'm doing it because it helps other people, because it reminds them why we're fighting in the first place! If I don't keep reminding people that Harry's out there trying to save us all, they'll turn on him and make him into the bad guy! People will start believing he really is a traitor; Undesirable Number 1!"

She finished her rant, panting heavily as she glared at Remus and Tonks, who were stood stock still, gaping at her slightly. The silence in the room was all encompassing and it seemed like no one wanted to break the deadlock.

In the end it was Tonks who stepped up to the bar.

"This has to end now Kitty," she said in a quiet voice, "I understand why you think it's important but it's too dangerous. But this time I'm not going to tell you what to do or threaten you. I'm asking you now, as a friend. Do this for me."

Kitty started at her for a long moment, torn between two paths. Finally she bowed her head slightly, knowing when to admit defeat.

“Ok,” she whispered, “for you...”

“Good,” Tonks nodded worriedly, glancing over to Remus who still looked angry, “that’s all sorted then...”

“Not completely,” Remus said finally, “we have to leave, it’s not safe here anymore. Pack your bags.”

“But-” she began, but he’d already turned his back on her and walked towards the bedroom, wand out.

Kitty frowned and turned back to Tonks.

“I didn’t mean for this to happen,” she tried to explain, feeling the seriousness of the situation hit her suddenly, “you know that don’t you?”

“I know,” Tonks sighed, moving towards her and pulling her into a hug, “I know you’d never do anything to hurt us intentionally.”

Kitty flinched at her words but wrapped her arms around her best friend. The bulge of Tonks’ pregnant belly pushed into Kitty’s and all at once reminded her of what she’d jeopardised. She felt tears swimming to her eyes, not only because of the guilt of what she’d risked, but also because she’d just lost her last chance to do something, anything, to help.

She gave a sniff and Tonks tightened her embrace.

“Don’t be upset Kitty,” she hushed gently, “I’m not angry, we’ve got plenty of safe houses lined up, we’ll have a new place to get used to soon enough.”

The thought of moving from one prison to another was more than she could bear and she screwed her eyes up against the tears.

“I can’t stand this...” she whispered painfully, “I can’t stand this waiting...this hiding...it’s driving me insane...”

“It’s hard on all of us sweetie, but it’s the only thing we can do right now. It’s too dangerous otherwise...”

Kitty nodded weakly. She knew all this, it was the same old story; put up and shut up. Just for once she would have liked to scream and shout, rant and rave and get everything off her chest. But she knew that in a strange way the cabin fever had begun to take hold, and even the mild-mannered Remus was shouting. This situation wasn’t helped either by the imminent arrival of Lupin junior, and everything that would entail. Shouting would be the worst thing she could possibly do.

So she packed her bags as Remus commanded and within twenty minutes they were moving on again. Another flat, this time in the north west, and another four-walled prison to get used to.

It was only two days later that the terrible news came.

22nd March 1998

Dear Anne,

Ted is dead. Remus found out this morning. I just knew something was wrong the moment Remus walked into my room, the look on his face...I thought it was Harry.

I’ve been with Tonks all day. She’s devastated. It’s terrible, but we’ve almost been expecting it ever since he left, but now it’s finally happened, it seems unreal. I always hoped he’d make it; if he can’t escape, how can we? I think it might have been the taboo which gave them away, Remus said Kingsley nearly got caught by it too just yesterday.

I only met him the once but he seemed like such a nice person. He was so excited about being a granddad, and now he’ll never get to see his grandchild, all those toys he was making are useless now; another family ripped apart.

Remus thinks we may have to move on again already, we don't know whether they tortured Ted for information before they killed him. He didn't know where we were staying, but he knew enough about us to prove useful to the Death Eaters. Remus has already taken Andromeda to a muggle care home and created a whole back story; I don't think she understood when I told her about Ted. I'm packing now and I'm not sure what's going to happen to us next.

I want to do something for Tonks to show her what Ted meant to me, to all of us. I wanted to do a painting, but our last argument was enough to stop me doing that forever now. I feel like I need to do something...

Who I am kidding? There's nothing I can do or say that's going to change the fact that those bastards murdered him, or that as every day goes by we lose a little more hope, a little more life. How many more times are they going to come to me with more death and destruction?

How long until it's Harry we'll be talking about?

He's been gone for so long now with barely a whisper of news. I read such outrageous things in the paper, sightings of him, lies made up to make him sound like a traitor, accusations that it was him that murdered Pops, not that bastard Snape. I worry that people will begin to lose faith in him, and if they don't have faith, what's left?

I've got to believe that he's out there and he can do this. The alternative isn't even an option now.

Tonks tells me that people will recognise the lies for what they are, but they're so convincing, just like that damn book about Pops and his 'life of lies'. I'm glad Harry isn't around to read that crap, he'd be so furious...

Anyway, I'm going now, Tonks is calling me. I wonder if we really are going to move on again and where we'll be next, somewhere isolated and safe I hope. The baby's due in under a months time and soon we won't be able to move anymore. I just hope we manage to find a midwife in time now that Tonks and Remus are listed as wanted.



## Welcome To The World

18th April 1998

A scream echoed through the corridors.

It was approaching midnight and Kitty was pacing down the hall of her small apartment, trying desperately to think. She froze at the sound; she just didn't know what to do, it wasn't supposed to happen like this. She needed help but didn't know how to summon it, since they'd been in hiding she'd be forbidden to communicate with other Order members, channels were being monitored.

She heard another long drawn out cry of pain from down the corridor and her mind was made up, monitored or not, she didn't have time to worry. She raised her wrist to her mouth without hesitation.

"Remus! Come quickly, we need you!"

Her heart was hammering madly and she could hear Tonks' cries of pain from here; how long would it be before he could come? She continued to pace, before sitting on the floor, head cradled in her arms.

Another yell, she closed her eyes wearily, begging silently for someone, anyone, to come.

She heard a sudden crack outside the door followed by mad hammering. She scrambled to her feet, unbolting it without a thought, forgetting the usual demands for passwords and proof of identity. Remus ran in, face deathly white in the gloom and look around frantically.

"What is it?" he demanded, gripping her wrist painfully tight, "What's wrong, what's happened?"

"It's Tonks," was all she said, pulling him down the corridor and into the small bedroom, "I didn't know what else to do..."

Tonks was sprawled out on the bed, face flushed and sweaty. She broke into a wide grin when she saw Remus with Kitty, but almost immediately her joyous expression dissolved into a grimace of agony. He rushed to her side and took up her hands, speaking to her soothingly.

“Why haven’t you fetched the midwife?” he asked Kitty angrily, throwing the demand over his shoulder.

“I couldn’t...she’s dead, remember? Last week in the Fishguard attack...” Kitty stammered, hopping from foot to foot in agitation, “I don’t know who else...I couldn’t think....we need to take her to hospital!”

“No!” countered Remus quickly, “It’s too dangerous, they’ll take her away...”

“What about my hospital? The muggle hospital?” she tried, rushing forward to Tonks’ side now as her best friend cried out in pain once more, “There’s not much time!”

“No...no...she mustn’t leave,” said Remus, almost too himself.

Kitty brushed Tonks’ sweaty fringe from her face, unable to swallow her fear. She didn’t know what to do, all she did know was that Remus and herself could not deliver a baby, they needed assistance. Magical assistance.

“Breathe Tonks,” Kitty said automatically, mimicking what she should be doing in the hope that somewhere in her pain, Tonks could feel what to do. They’d read all the books and learnt all the techniques together, but somehow once faced with the screams and the pain, all the practice went out of the window.

She felt the panic well up inside her.

“Remus, we’ve got to do something!” she exclaimed anxiously, “I can’t do this on my own!”

Remus was still staring at his wife, his face a mask of fear and desperation. She knew he was trying to think but she was worried about how long it would take; time was not a luxury they could afford now.

“I’ve got to...” he said vaguely, rising to his feet, “I’ve got to...I’ll be back...”

With that he hurried from the room and Kitty didn’t even have time to ask him where he was going before she heard the front door slam and the crack of someone disappearing from beyond the protective wards. For a moment she just stared at Tonks blankly; she couldn’t believe Remus had just left her.

Then she snapped out of it. She was all Tonks had right now, and she would be scared enough without seeing Kitty’s panic. A sense of calm washed over her as she decided that she wouldn’t let the situation beat them. Her determination not to fail was the only thing they had now.

“Right Tonks, I may not be able to wave a wand, but I’ve watched enough movies to know how to do this muggle way!” she proclaimed in what she hoped was an authoritative voice, shifting position on the bed, “Now we read the books and talked about this. Deep, steady breaths! Breathe!”

Her friend did as she commanded and after a long minute and as the contractions subsided she fixed her with what would, in normal circumstances, have been an amused look.

“You’ve watched enough movies?” she gasped, shaking her head, “Doesn’t fill me with confidence...”

“It’s going to be ok Tonks,” she nodded vigorously, “Remus has gone to get help, it’s going to be fine...”

“You say that like you’re the one squeezing a melon out,” she said, trying to grin but failing miserably.

“It’s going to be ok,” Kitty repeated, “and when this is over I’m going to remind you that you called your first born a melon.”

They continued down this vein for nearly ten minutes, working through the contractions and resting in between, all the while she kept up a steady stream of uselessly supportive comments. She had never wished more in her life than right at that moment that she could do magic; anything to spare Tonks all this pain.

Suddenly she heard two distinct cracking sounds from beyond the walls of the small house and her heart leapt; help had arrived! Moments later Remus burst into the room, closely followed by Mrs Weasley, who looked grim of face but exuded a maternal authority that almost instantly soothed Kitty.

“Right Tonks, how far apart dear?” she demanded, dropping a large carpet bag to the floor and bending over her friend.

She however could not speak, crying out as another contraction took a hold of her and Kitty was forced to speak for her.

“Every three minutes,” Kitty said hurriedly, “she only felt the first twinge two hours ago...we weren’t sure if it was something and then suddenly...”

She gestured helplessly to the situation in front of her.

“That’s one baby eager to get out and see the world,” remarked Mrs Weasley calmly, “right Remus dear, hot water and towels. Kitty, fetch me the blue potion bottle from my bag.”

All at once there was activity, Remus was running from the room and Kitty was rummaging through the large bag, which was packed with odd jars and bundles of linen. She handed her the potion and followed every command issued from the domineering woman, for once glad to be told what to do.

She administered potions and sat with Tonks, gripping her hand tightly and keeping her calm. Some of the remedies must have begun to work because Tonks' cries of pain weren't so anguished, although Kitty thought her fingers might never recover from their crushing.

Remus was relegated to the corridor, Mrs Weasley adamant about this being women's business and as the hour dragged on Kitty sensed they were reaching the end. Tonks was beginning to look exhausted and she was paying less attention to their commands.

"Why didn't you fetch the midwife Kitty?" asked Mrs Weasley during a quiet moment.

"She's dead! The Fishgaurd attack last week!" Kitty explained hurriedly, "I said we ought to have sorted out a replacement straight away but Remus was away and I couldn't contact anyone!"

"Don't worry dear, it's not your fault," she said, shooting an annoyed glance at the door behind which Remus was pacing, "it took us a long time to find the first midwife and that was before Tonks was listed as an Undesirable. We would never have found someone else in time."

"Is she going to be ok?" Kitty asked anxiously, mopping her friends sweating brow.

"I've been through this seven times myself, so she's in capable hands," assured Mrs Weasley and Kitty felt comforted.

Tonks began to yell again and she knew it was close to the time. Spells were being woven left, right and centre and then came the final push.

"Come on Tonks! You can do it!" cried Kitty loudly, gripping her friends hand tightly.

There was a long drawn out scream from Tonks and then...silence...

A baby began to cry.

In a matter of seconds the room had altered forever, Mrs Weasley was bent over the bawling baby and Tonks had flopped back onto the bed, gasping painfully. Kitty rushed to Mrs Weasley's aid, fetching more potions for Tonks and blankets for the baby.

She was just gathering it up into her arms when Remus, obviously hearing the noise and being unable to stand the solitude any longer, burst in. Kitty watched him as he laid eyes on his child for the first time, and knew that the months of fighting and arguments had been for nothing, there was true love in his eyes. He would never leave his child.

"What is it?" he asked hoarsely, looking quite maddened with his hair sticking up every which way.

"It's a boy," Mrs Weasley proclaimed, holding the bundle out to him.

Reverentially he took it and Kitty caught a glimpse of black hair beneath the swaddling.

"Do you hear that Tonks?" whispered Remus, sitting down on the bed next to his wife, "A boy..."

Tonks raised a heavy arm, pushing aside the cloth as she peered into the bundle.

"He's perfect..." she said painfully.

Remus nodded, staring down at his son in awe; Kitty could practically feel the love radiating from the couple. She wondered in a distracted way whether her own mother had been so overjoyed at her birth or whether her father, whoever he was, had known about her. Shaking these thoughts from her head she grinned at the knowledge that this baby would never growing up wondering what it would be like to have the love of a parent.

"He looks a little like dad...doesn't he?"

Remus nodded silently; for them all the loss of Ted Tonks was still a wound too fresh and deep to prod. Kitty joined them seated on the bed, staring down for the first time at the newest addition to their unusual family.

“He’s gorgeous,” she said, stroking a finger against the baby’s soft cheek, “He does look a little like Ted...”

“Remus...” began Tonks, before breathing deeply, exhaustion getting the better of her, “let’s call him Ted...Teddy Remus Lupin.”

“It’s perfect,” he said, planting a warm kiss on his wife’s forehead, “he’s perfect. And so are you...Now get some rest, I’ll look after Teddy.”

Tonks fell back into the pillows and Mrs Weasley continued to cast strange spells with no visible benefit around them for some time. Remus walked out with his son and Kitty watched them go, still sitting beside her friend.

“Well done Tonks,” she said warmly, gazing down at her friend with a new found sense of respect and awe, “you were brilliant.”

“Couldn’t have done it without you...” she said muzzily, “Kitty, you will be godmother, won’t you?”

It took a moment for her to understand what she was referring to, and then she could only stare at her blankly, completely taken by surprise.

“What – me?” she demanded incredulously, “Why?”

“Because you’re my best friend...and I know you’ll take care of him...my son...if anything should happen to me...to us...”

Kitty’s breath hitched at the very thought.

“Nothing’s going to happen to you...” she whispered, horrified.

“These are dark times...” Tonks said, raising pleading eyes to her own, “please promise me you’ll look after him?”

Tears were pricking her eyes and she shook her head vehemently, “But you’ll be fine, we all will...”

“Sometimes I don’t think so...” Tonks admitted, gazing off into the middle distance, “I’ve been too lucky so far...with Remus and now...Teddy. You don’t get away with everything we have for too long in times like these...we’ve made powerful enemies...”

Kitty couldn’t answer straight away, a sharp lump had developed in her throat at the sound of Tonks putting into words everything which so terrified her. Every night she’d nightmare about Riddles supporters discovering her and Tonks’ hideout, about Remus never returning, about hearing that most dreaded of news; Harry had been captured, tortured, killed...

“It’s all going to be ok Tonks...Harry and the others, they’ll do it. I believe in him, Dumbledore did....we all do...” she said, swallowing back the tears, “and Teddy...he’ll grow up in a new world, where it doesn’t matter if your muggle or magic, where you don’t have to hide because of who you are, what you are.”

“He will,” Tonks said fiercely, squeezing Kitty’s hand suddenly, “and if we’re not there to see that, you will be. You and Harry. Promise?”

“Tonks,” protested Kitty, unwilling to admit aloud about future possibilities, “please...”

“Promise?” Tonks demanded, louder.

Kitty looked into her best friends’ eyes, electric blue meeting weary brown for a long moment, searching.

“I promise,” she whispered finally.

Tonks seemed pleased to hear this and closed her eyes gratefully as if now she could rest because her heart had been put at ease. In a



way Kitty was glad Tonks trusted her so and that she could give this comfort, but it left her feeling cold and empty inside.

Never before had she felt the urgent need to see Harry burn as fiercely in her soul; even just a glimpse of him after nine months of separation would be enough to quell her fears. There was too much now to cope with; too many deaths announced on Potterwatch, names she recognised, too many attacks on the muggle and magical news, too much hiding, too much fear.

The thought that at this very moment he was sitting in a house not so far from here and she couldn't even visit him for a few seconds was more than she could bear. He was probably eating dinner with Bill and Fleur right now and planning his next move. She wondered if he thought of her at all.

As she shook her head of these disturbing thoughts she realised that Tonks' face looked slack and she was already slipping into the warm embrace of the sleep of exhaustion. Carefully she pulled her hand from her friends, tucked her in tightly and crept out the room, flicking the light off.

She went down the corridor and found Mrs Weasley and Remus. He looked absolutely elated, gushing enthusiastically as Mrs Weasley washed little Teddy clean. Kitty had never seen him so animated.

"His hairs starting to change don't you think Molly?" he was asking, speaking quickly and hovering over Mrs Weasley's shoulder, "It's definitely lighter I think! Tonks said hers started changing within the hour! Perhaps he's taking after her? He definitely has her nose, or her favourite nose at least!"

He paused as Kitty stepped into the room and beamed.

"Kitty!" he cried, moving swiftly forward and embracing her, "The woman of the hour! Thank you so much for all your hard work and for being here! I don't know what we'd do without you! Have you seen him properly? Come and take a look!"

She couldn't help but grin slightly at the usually reserved man's enthusiasm and he pulled her forward and they gazed admiringly at the baby in the small tin bath. Kitty smiled and reached out the baby's fist curled around her little finger and held onto it tightly.

"He's a strong one," she observed.

"He's a little fighter," agreed Remus, bouncing on the balls of his feet, "I think he likes you!"

"Is Tonks asleep?" asked Mrs Weasley, picking up the baby and drying him off now.

"Out for the count, she's exhausted," explained Kitty, watched the woman's every movement, memorising how to care for a baby, just in case, "she asked me to be godmother!"

"A fine choice!" laughed Remus, before adding with a wink, "You'll keep him on the straight and narrow!"

She merely grinned, lurch of the stomach at his implied words; did he think he wouldn't be around either? Did he share Tonks' pessimism?

"I'm going to ask Harry to be godfather," Remus told her, staring in adoration at his son, "do you think he'll say yes?"

"He'll be honoured," Kitty replied, feeling the familiar squeezing pain in her heart whenever she thought of him.

"It will be me that will be honoured, if he says yes," he said, even in his exhilaration showing the shame he felt for the way he and Harry had last parted, "but I trust Harry and know that he would protect my son, if it came to it."

She frowned at him; why on today of all days were they both so keen on dying?

“Why are you both talking like this?” Kitty demanded, still shuddering at his words, “You speak as if you’re both going to die tomorrow-”

“-We could,” cut in Remus.

“No, you’ll be fine,” she maintained stubbornly, “you’re both just being...morbid...”

“Just realistic Kitty,” said Remus softly and she could hardly bear to look into his eyes, that were so full of understanding, knowledge, certainty.

“If we don’t make it; if I don’t make it,” he began, heaving a deep sigh, “at least you can help him understand; that we’re trying to make a world in which he can live a happier life.”

Kitty stared into his eyes as he had done with Tonks. She’d never understand it, the pessimism, the willingness to die. Why didn’t they fight with every bone in their body? Especially now that they had something to protect.

“He’s sleeping now,” said Mrs Weasley softly, placing Teddy into the Weasley family cot that had been loaned to the Lupin’s, “I should go back, I don’t want to be away from the family for too long...”

The implication was left hanging the air once again. Everyone knew she wanted to add ‘you never know what could happen’.

“And I must tell everyone the wonderful news!” exclaimed Remus excitedly, as if the last few moments of conversation had not existed.

“Are you sure that’s wise?” frowned Mrs Weasley, ever cautious.

“Of course!” he said exuberantly, reaching for his travelling cloak, “They’ll all want to know, and I must ask Harry to be godfather!”

“Surely it can wait-” began Mrs Weasley before Kitty cut in.

“You’re seeing Harry?” she rushed, heart suddenly soaring, “I’m coming.”

After nine months she could finally see him.

“No we can’t risk you travelling,” Mrs Weasley told her firmly, “it’s madness for Remus to go, let alone you!”

“Please Remus?” she pleaded, completely ignoring Mrs Weasley.

“Kitty, we can’t risk it...you know the rules, we can’t risk you being discovered, if the Death Eaters get hold of you, Harry will be forced out of hiding.”

“I won’t get caught, I promise! Please take me with you Remus,” she begged, actually grabbing hold of his arm and clinging on tightly, “I haven’t seen him for nine months...please just a few moments with him? I’ve been stuck inside for so long!”

“Kitty, we can’t,” he said softly, disengaging her hands, “I understand your desperation, but you must do this, Harry wouldn’t want you risking yourself. Besides, we can’t leave Teddy and Tonks here alone. You’re godmother now, you have a duty.”

For a moment Kitty could only stare at him in open-mouthed fury, the thought that Harry was so close that she could be seeing him in a matter of moments and it was being denied her was more than she could stand. She wanted to plead some more, beg Remus to understand her position, but she knew deep down he was right.

She’d been in hiding with Tonks for many months now and she could not risk being captured; all the Order houses were being watched. She knew only too well what would happen if she were caught. The thought that Harry would risk everything to rescue her was a strangely comforting, yet deeply disturbing one.

Mrs Weasley was giving her instructions on what to do if Teddy or Tonks woke up and all the while Kitty could just nod, not hearing a

word. She was following Remus' movements, swinging on his cloak face already plastered with a joyous grin forgetting all about Kitty's suffering. Mrs Weasley went first and Remus prepared to follow her into the blustering gale; they'd been disconnected from the floo for some months.

He turned to her at the doorway.

"Take care of my family Kitty!" he exclaimed happily.

"Hang on! Remus!" she blurted suddenly, running forwards, "Can you give Harry something for me?"

She pulled the battered photograph out of her back pocket, so careworn and creased it now felt like softened cloth rather than paper. Hastily she grabbed a pencil from the side and hovered it over the back. What to write?

Nothing would come to mind, how could she possibly convey in a few words the torment of being parted for so long, the longing she felt to see him again, her fears and hopes?

In the end she lowered pencil to paper.

Come back to me.

She thrust it to Remus, who nodded, folding it into his robes without looking at it.

He gave a lingering look towards his son before stepping out into the night. As the door closed she heard the loud crack of disapparation.

With a sigh Kitty sank into the chair next to the cot, staring through the bars at the latest addition to her new unorthodox family. She missed Harry so desperately that it actually hurt. She pressed a hand against her chest, as if trying to keep in a heart that was breaking, before the tears started.

Perhaps there were tears of joy mingled in, but mostly they were tears of despair; For Remus and Tonks, who thought their days were numbered, for Teddy, who was born into a world of war and suffering, for Harry, for carrying the hopes and expectations of everyone and saving none for himself and for herself, denied the one thing she needed most.

At the end of the day, the sacrifice is not as easy to perform as others think.

Until Midnight

1st May 1998

It had been a gloriously sunny day. It was so lovely that for the first time in a long time, Kitty desperately wanted to go outside for a walk, shop in town, sit on a bench and watch the world go by. It was completely impossible of course, only yesterday there had been a sighting of a gang of Snatchers a mile away from their hideout and, amazingly, they hadn't been discovered.

So instead of being outside in the sunshine, both her and Tonks were recreating the great outdoors in their living room. Tonks had transfigured the carpet into grass, the sun was streaming through the now-invisible ceiling and there were even little bluebirds twittering around their heads. Kitty watched them smilingly, letting the music from the wizarding wireless wash over her as outside the real sun started to set.

The news had just ended; it had been the usual roll call of the dead or mysteriously disappeared and details of new attacks, which today included a suspected break-in to Gringotts. It had made the top headline because of the escaped dragon but Kitty couldn't even feel surprised by this, there wasn't much she was surprised about now in the magical world.

She remarked as much to Tonks as she played with Teddy. Having a newborn baby in the house had transformed their lives for the better. Before both her and Tonks had been retreating into their own silent worlds of fear and sorrow, hers revolving around Harry and his quest

and Tonks' around her fathers' death. But as soon as Teddy came into their lives there was suddenly a new purpose, a reason to get up and get dressed in the morning; something to love and protect.

Suddenly all the effort that had gone into sadness and depression was focussed on the tiny new life. At only a month old he already had a very definite personality and spending almost every waking moment in his presence had taught her more than Kitty thought possible about baby behaviour. She knew for example he had 8 types of cries, each of which meant something different.

She also knew that he was incredibly ticklish and that he could recognise her voice because when she spoke or sang to him, his little eyes focussed vaguely in the direction and she was sure there was a light of recognition.

"There goes his hair again," Kitty noted, looking over to Tonks, who was lying on the grass in a bikini top and loose trousers, trying to get an indoor tan and get rid of her stretch marks.

She rolled over and grinned at her baby, before picking up a large leather bound book.

"Green this time," she laughed, making a note of this and looking at her watch.

"He's always goes green if I tickle him, just here," motioned Kitty and Teddy burbled happily, "now if you want red hair, you have to tickle here."

Sure enough the tufts of hair atop the baby's head started to lighten to a violent shade of red, not ginger. Tonks laughed incredulously, making a note of this in the baby book, before shuffling over to Teddy and stroking his hair.

"Aren't you a clever little boy?" she cooed proudly, before looking over to Kitty, "I couldn't change that quickly for months apparently, I've checked my book."

“That’s because he’s a Lupin,” Kitty said happily, “and he’s got your looks and Remus’ smarts.”

“I’m glad that’s the only way he takes after his dad,” she said casually.

Kitty knew what she meant, they’d had a sleepless few nights watching him during the first full moon, waiting for any sign that he would suffer as Remus did. She didn’t know what she was expecting, a little baby wolf or something, but she was infinitely glad that Teddy was the only one who’d got any sleep during those 3 days; no sign of the wolf at all.

Teddy must have noticed that they were talking between themselves and not doting on him because he began mewling.

“Needs feeding,” said Kitty, already jumping up and heading over the kitchen to get his latest bottles.

“Don’t know what I’d do without you Kitty,” called Tonks as she shook at brightly coloured rattle in front of Teddy’s face, “definitely wouldn’t get as much sleep.”

“Yeah well, I’m a bit of a night owl anyway,” she replied, wandering back into the living room with a bottle, “sleep all day and work all night. Harry always teased me for not knowing there were two 8s in the day...”

As usual the reference to Harry, which slipped so naturally off her tongue seemed to act like a sudden beacon and the mood of the room shifted around it. Even the fake sunshine coming from the ceiling seemed to dull, as if a passing cloud had shaded it.

“Why don’t you feed him?” Tonks suggested, trying to pretend nothing had happened.

She gave a slight smile, before cradling Teddy and pushing the bottle towards him, he almost instantly latched on and there was nothing but the sound of him sucking and the music coming from the wireless.



“Do you know it’s nearly been a year?” Kitty mentioned casually.

Tonks didn’t even pretend not to know what she was talking about; it had been over ten months since she’d last seen Harry at Bill and Fleur’s wedding.

“And you’re coping better than I could ever have hoped for,” Tonks said warmly, “Harry will be so proud of you, when he finds out how well you’ve done. For doing so well at college before you left, all the amazing things you’ve painted since...looking after me and Remus, helping me deliver Teddy...you are my guardian angel. The best godmother we could ask for.”

Kitty smiled to herself, watching Teddy with misty eyes. When she put it like that it sounded so brave and selfless, but she’d been terrified nearly every moment the past two years.

“Not to mention the hope you’ve given other people,” Tonks continued, “your paintings. I know we told you to stop but now other people have started doing them in your place...I saw in the Prophet yesterday that six lightning bolts appeared in one night up and down the country.”

Kitty smiled to herself, although she no longer painted her murals on the streets anymore, she was glad they’d served their purpose and given others a focus. She wondered if Harry knew anything of what was happening in the wider world and whether he’d become even more of a symbol that he had already been.

At the thought of Harry her stomach tightened and she stared down at Teddy, whose eyes were ironically now a sparkling emerald green.

“Do you know, when all this over, I’m going to take Harry on holiday?” she said, thinking back to the plans she detailed in her diary night after night.

“Oh yeah, where?”

“Cornwall. We always said that was where we were going to go when we ran away that time. We’re going to have our honeymoon there,” she added, “I think, when this is all over, and he’s got rid of Riddle once and for all, I’m going to take him there. And we’re going to camp, and surf, and have barbeques and not think about any of this; just be normal.”

“I think that’s exactly what he’ll need,” Tonks said in a careful voice.

“It will be. It’s just going to be us, and we’re going to sleep in late together, and go for walks and just...sit and watch the sea.”

“Sounds perfect.”

Kitty loved talking about these plans and the feeling that she was challenging Tonks or Remus to contradict her, to even suggest that Cornwall might not happen and the future wasn’t how she’d decided it was going to be. She hadn’t gone through all these years of pain and loneliness for nothing. There had to be a happy ending.

Teddy had now finished his bottle and she swung him onto her shoulder to burp him, swaying in time to the music.

“It’s going to happen Kitty,” said Tonks now, clambering to her feet too, “I’ve got a good feeling in my bones about that. Harry’s a born fighter, and like you said, he’s managed to evade capture for nearly a year, no one else has done that.”

Kitty’s thoughts immediately went to Tonks’ father, who’d been one of the countless who’d never managed to escape. He was killed just because he refused to sign that ridiculous muggle-born register. She was infinitely glad they’d never found her and asked her to sign.

“It’s going to be weird isn’t it?” Kitty suggested suddenly, “When all this is over we won’t be living together anymore, will we? When I’m living with Harry and you’re with Remus, we’ll have to make sure we’ll live close together, so we can still hang out.”

“Yeah,” Tonks agreed softly, watching Kitty and Teddy intently, “we’ll always be close. And when you and Harry have kids of your own, they can play with Teddy.”

Kitty nodded emphatically, bopping almost in time to the beat of the music now, it was nice to pretend, just for a while, that they had some control over what was going to happen in their future. She began humming along to the song, gazing down at Teddy feeling the familiar swell of love she held in her heart for her friend and the small life she was cradling.

Tonks was humming along with the song too now, it was a Wyrd Sisters track, Tonks’ favourite band. She was beginning Teddy’s musical education early.

“Move your body like a hairy troll, learning to rock and roll,” Tonks began to sing, crooning at the baby over Kitty’s shoulder.

“Spin around like a crazy elf, chimed in Kitty, spinning Teddy around with a grin, “dancin’ by himself.”

“Boogie down like a unicorn, not stopping ‘til the break of dawn,” laughed Tonks, beginning to jive now.

“Put your hands up in the air, like an ogre who just don’t care,” they sang in unison, Teddy watching them with a blank baby look, seemingly listening intently to what was going on.

They both began to laugh, bopping around on the carpet made of grass and basking in the glorious midday sunshine even though it was approaching seven in the evening. Sometimes the magical world wasn’t too bad, Kitty thought to herself, spinning around crazily and feeling quite dizzy, embracing the cabin fever.

“Move around like a scary ghost, spooking himself the most! Shake your booty like a boggart in pain, again and again and again!” they squealed happily, jiving to the motions.

“Get it on like an angry spectre, who’s definitely out to get ya! Stomp your feet like a leprechaun  
Get it on-”

“TONKS!”

The yell came so suddenly that they both froze almost comically in their various dancing positions. Kitty's stomach had turned to ice and she clutched Teddy to her instinctively, first thought leaping to her gun, which was stowed far away in her bedroom. However, spinning on her heel she saw not a Death Eater but Remus striding into the room, looking ashen faced.

“What? What is it?” Tonks demanded instantly, rushing over to his side.

“What's happened to Harry?” Kitty cut in, also rushing over to him, a horrible suffocating blackness already creeping into her consciousness.

“The Gringotts break-in, I think it was them. I don't know why, but they escaped. He's gone to Hogwarts, they're calling everyone in to defend the castle, You-Know-Who is on his way there.”

Kitty heard the words but couldn't take them in; it felt like they were coming from a long way away, echoing oddly down a long tunnel.

“But...”

She sank onto the sofa, legs trembling too much to support her weight. She stared unseeingly in front of her as all around there was the sound of movement and rushing about.

This was it.

After two years, it came down to this.

Had Harry done enough? Had he destroyed all the Horcruxes already? Did he only have Tom Riddle to kill now? She needed to voice all her questions and raised her eyes to find Tonks and Remus rushing back into the living room, she now dressed in her work

robes, wand clutched in hand and a determined expression on her face.

“What...” Kitty demanded in confusion, sidetracked, “Why are you dressed like that....you’re not...”

“We have to go and help,” Tonks cut in quickly, “the school is still full of students.”

“But...” she tried, unable to articulate her words properly.

“This is it Kitty,” Remus told her, crouching down in front of her and laying a hand on her shoulder, “we need you to stay here and look after Teddy. We’ll send for you when it’s all over.”

“But...” she struggled, “I want to help.”

“You are helping Kitty, you’re protecting Teddy for us,” he said encouragingly.

“I can help though...I need to help...”

“Not this time,” said Tonks softly, also crouching down in front of her, “you promised me you’d look after Teddy, no matter what. You’re time’s come to prove that.”

“But...I want to help Harry...”

“Kitty,” Tonks began softly, “there’s nothing you can do...it’d be too dangerous for you. We need you to protect our son now, do you understand? I need you to do this.”

Kitty stared for a long moment into her best friends’ eyes. There were alight with a strange glow, and she had the sudden, horrible thought that she was never going to see her again.

“Ok,” Kitty whispered, tears welling up into her eyes now, “but please be careful....I can’t...I can’t lose you too...”

“I promise we’ll be back in no time,” said Tonks, smile skittering across her features, “and we’ll bring Harry with us.”

“You promise?” she demanded, tears sliding down her cheeks now, “you promise you’ll come back to me?”

“Of course,” she replied calmly.

“Keep the wireless tuned in,” Remus was telling her, “the emergency broadcast will kick in and they should update everyone with what’s happening. It’ll be over soon.”

Kitty climbed unsteadily to her feet, unsure of what to do or say now. In the end she was solved by ever having to think of anything by Tonks pulling her into a tight embrace, Teddy sandwiched between the two. She was crying freely but a strange peace and certainty had washed over Tonks now.

“I love you Tonks,” Kitty whispered emotionally, “please come back.”

“I will sweetie, don’t you worry about me,” she replied calmly.

When she pulled away Tonks bent down and pressed her lips against Teddy’s forehead.

“I’ll be back soon little man,” she whispered to him.

Kitty thought her heart would break.

Remus did the same and then they were standing in front of her, ready to go. A million and one things to say ran through Kitty’s mind, but she’d couldn’t unstuck her tongue to say even one of them.

In the end she could only manage a weak good luck. They both gave her an identical warm smile and bade her goodbye, before twisting on the spot and disappearing with a crack.

She stood staring at the patch of grassy carpet for several long minutes, trying to process everything. She couldn't shake the feeling that she'd just wasted her last words with her friends.

It was only the crackling of the wireless that dragged her out of her horrified trance and with a start she hurried over to it, crouching down in front of it and clutching Teddy to her as if she were a drowning sailor and he was her only safety.

The music had been cut-off abruptly and instead of the smooth sounding voice of the host, was the sound of a very different one that was quite obviously scared and confused but trying to mask it with professionalism.

“Reports are coming in that Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry is under attack...efforts are being made to evacuate the students...”

The voice stopped. Long minutes of silence stretched out until her nerves were twanging, ready to snap at any moment.

“It is confirmed that Hogwarts is under attack. Reports are coming in that Harry Potter, The Chosen One, has been sighted within the grounds.”

“HARRY!” she shrieked, jumping to her feet.

She placed Teddy in his cot and picked up the wireless, clinging it to her as if it were her lifeline.

“Talk to me,” she yelled at it, shaking it violently, “Come on, tell me! Is he there, is he ok? WHAT’S HAPPENING?”

Kitty continued to yell and rant at the device but it was a full fifteen minutes before anymore noise issued from its speakers.

“A demand is being broadcast across Hogwarts and Hogsmeade...” whispered the voice.

“WHAT’S IT SAYING?”

Silence.

“WHO? TELL ME-”

“Give me Harry Potter, and none shall be harmed.”

The voice of her nightmares reared out of the speakers and her blood froze in her veins.

“Give me Harry Potter, and I shall leave the school untouched. Give me Harry Potter, and you shall be rewarded. You have until midnight.”

There Will Be A Tomorrow

Victory Day: 2nd May 1998

It would become known as Victory Day.

She wasn’t to know that then, but it would. And it was Victory Day. It was the day everyone had been fighting years for. But it didn’t feel like a victory.

Kitty was sat on wooden bench, baby cradled in her arms as she stared down at the rows of bodies in front of her. Somehow she couldn’t take it all in.

She knew that the two bodies immediately in front of her, laid closer together than the others, would be Remus and Tonks. She had been told it was them anyway, but she didn’t believe it. The dust was barely settled in Hogwarts, the sun had risen on the new day and they’d only been gone a matter of hours.

The baby in her arms began to mew and Kitty wondered in a disjointed way whether he knew already that he was seeing his parents for the last time.



The last time...

This was the last time she'd see Tonks, see Remus.

Tonks, who had been more than a sister or best friend could ever be to her and now she was just lying here, covered by a thin sheet as if she was some unsightly piece of rubbish. It was more than she could bear.

Tears began to slide down her cheeks and the baby began to cry, loud heart-tearing wails that only the newborn could produce. She couldn't even bear to look at him, to comfort him, the noise drilled into her brain, pushing out all other thoughts.

"Kaitlyn, let me take him."

It sounded like Mrs Weasley, and in a disjointed way Kitty was relieved; she at least had survived then...

Comforting arms appeared from somewhere and relieved her of the burden, but it was nothing compared to the weight in her heart. She felt like it had been replaced by an icy stone and she could not stop the tears from sliding faster, the despair welling up and the sobs being released. They echoed around the large room mingling with those of the multitude of people, many of whom were knelt next to their own white-sheeted lump.

She found herself suddenly climbing to her feet and approaching the two bodies slowly, kneeling down next to the smaller of the two. She knew what she'd see, but thought if she didn't look, she'd always not quite believe that they were gone.

It was with a shaking hand that she reached across and took hold of the sheet, drawing it back so that the familiar face of Tonks was exposed. The shaking sobs increased as she stared down at her, feeling cheated by the peaceful expression, she just looked like she was sleeping.

“Wotcher Tonks,” she gasped, reaching down to stroke the cold cheek, “Where’d you go?”

She didn’t reply. She never would.

Kitty grasped the second sheet, pulling it back to reveal the youthful, similarly peaceful looking face of Remus. They just looked like they were sleeping, as if she’d caught them having drifted off on the sofa together. How could it be possible? How could they be dead when they looked like at any moment they’d open a bleary eye, demand coffee or the morning paper.

“This is all wrong...” she gasped, feeling the terrible grinding pain in her soul, “I needed you...Teddy needs you...”

She’d seen them only hours ago, in their small home. She’d felt like she’d only just been dancing with Tonks around the living room, sunning themselves on their fake summers day. How could her whole world have been turned upside down in so short a time?

“You said you’d come back to me...” she choked, reaching out and grasping Tonks hand and feeling unpleasantly surprised to find she was already icy cold...

Not really knowing why she was doing it, she took her hand and placed it in Remus’. Now they really did look like they’d just fallen asleep.

“Sweet dreams...”

She crouched back on her haunches, staring blankly at the two now, before dropping her head to her knees. Gasping for breath between the racking sobs, she wrapped her arms around her head, desperate to shut out the sounds of suffering and pain. Desperate to rid herself of the terrible sense of remorse and guilt. Desperate to erase her own memory.

“Kitty...”

Another voice this time, again comforting. With difficulty, she unfolded herself and looked to her side. It was Hermione. Still splattered with dirt and blood, tear tracks standing out vivid white against the grime.

“Oh my...oh Hermione!” she gasped, scrambling forward and pulling her into a fierce embrace, “You’re ok...”

“I’m fine...” she whispered.

“I thought...” struggled Kitty, still clinging onto the girl, “I was looking for you all here, under the sheets...”

Hermione didn’t reply, Kitty thought there was probably nothing she could say. When they pulled apart Kitty still clung to the girls arms, studying her intently.

“And Ron...” she began fearfully, “is he...”

“He’s fine.”

“Thank god,” Kitty whispered, nodding to herself quickly, hating having to ask the next question, “and the others...who-who else?”

Hermione seemed to struggle with her words for a moment and a darting glance across the hall confirmed Kitty’s worst fear, she was looking at more white sheets.

“Fred...Fred and Ginny didn’t....” she tried, before crumpling, “they didn’t make it.”

Kitty felt her insides freeze and she could do nothing but cling onto Hermione as they wept; wept for the escape they’d had and for those that hadn’t. It was more than she could take in at that moment, the list of the dead was growing, each name just a collection of letters and yet each represented a life, stopped short.

Was there one last name on the list for her?

“Hermione,” she began, realising as she spoke that this was the most difficult question she’d ever have to ask, “I heard...the news came in...they said Harry...died...but here they said he survived...they said he did it, killed Riddle...”

“He did it. Voldemort’s dead. He survived.”

Kitty couldn’t process the information, she merely stared unseeing at the line of bodies in front of her, nodding. Somehow now the tears wouldn’t come, she didn’t know whether to feel relieved, terrified, distraught...now she was just tired. Utter weariness to the very centre of her soul. The long years of pain and uncertainty had ended here on the cold floor of the Great Hall; why didn’t she feel happy?

She struggled against her emotions, staring blankly at the faces of death stretched out in front of her; her best friends...gone. She’d shared everything with them. Tonks had been there at her darkest moments, deep in despair without Harry. She’d saved her from attacks, protected her, sheltered her.

Kitty couldn’t save her though. She’d never laugh with her again at a silly joke, cry in the deep dark of the night together, dance around the living room, play with her and Teddy, make plans for the future...The ache in her heart was now so painful she thought she might just breakdown there on the floor and never get up.

Only one thing could stop her feeling this, or rather, only one person.

“I need...” she began dully, before taking a deep breath, “where is he?”

Hermione squeezed her hands tightly.

“Where’s Harry?”

“He went to Gryffindor Tower. I think he’s sleeping.”

Again all she could do was nod. After a long moment she took the hold of the white sheets and pulled them slowly back over her friends

faces, knowing this would be the last time she'd ever see them. She felt like she ought to mark the occasion with significant words or actions, but nothing came to her. There was nothing she could say to right this wrong, nothing she could do. She knew they'd understand, she'd honour them in her own way.

Unable to deal with the thoughts in her head or process the feelings in her heart, she climbed to her feet and simply dusted herself down. She walked out of the Great Hall, fighting the urge with every step to turn and look at her best friends one last time.

Much of Hogwarts was now in ruins. She didn't know the way to the Tower, but paintings directed her in shell-shocked tones and she stumbled through the rubble and the bodies that had not yet been recovered. It was terrible how similar a school robe was to those of the Death Eaters, eventually she stopped looking at the bodies, eyes trained forward, everything shut out.

How else could you walk through that shadow of death unscathed?

Eventually she reached her final destination; the end of a long path that had taken her two years to walk, mostly alone, always afraid.

What was once a secret entrance into the Tower was now nothing more than a gaping hole, some of it still smouldering. She pushed her way through, legs pulling her body forward. She wanted nothing more than to see Harry again, but was terrified of what she would find at the end of the staircase. Ploughing on, almost no thought going on in her mind now, she climbed the stairs, found the door, entered.

It smelled like bonfire night. Like fireworks, burning wood and acrid air, all assailing her senses. She instantly saw him and realised all at once that this would be the happiest, most relieved that she would ever be in her life. And yet, this was the saddest she thought she'd ever been.

So much had been snatched away from her in that one night, but here was the one thing, one person, who could make it all go away.

Harry was lying fully dressed on the large bed, wide awake and staring into the sunbeams that were filtering through the leaded windows. He made no move to show he'd registered her entering and she hesitantly approached the bed, heart hammering against her chest almost audibly. She stood in front of him, blocking the sunlight now and taking in every detail of his appearance.

He, like Hermione, was still smeared in blood and sweat and dirt. He was cut and bruised and battered and as motionless as the corpses below them. Biting her lip against the tears springing to her eyes, Kitty cautiously moved forward and climbed up onto the bed.

It had been nearly a year since she'd last seen him, disappearing from the wedding marquee as all around her the world screamed. He'd changed. He looked older, thinner, paler, sadder. Like someone had lived a hundred years, not 17.

He seemed to be staring right through her, she wondered if he'd even registered her presence. She looked deep into his eyes and saw everything she needed to see, she could see the hurt, the pain, the guilt, the sorrow. She saw that haunted, hunted look she'd come to recognise and hate in the early days.

"Harry?" she whispered tentatively, reaching out and brushing his dirty hair from his face.

He focussed his eyes onto her, staring at her for a long time, unblinkingly. So many emotions seemed to be flickering through his eyes that she couldn't keep up and yet he seemed so still and peaceful.

"It's over."

She swallowed and nodded at his words, tears welling up once more. Not for her fallen friends this time, but for him and everything he'd lost. She could see it in his eyes, like a little bit of his soul had been taken away and he would never be quite the same again.

“You did it Harry,” she told him in a tight voice, “you made it. He’s gone.”

“We did it.”

His voice sounded hoarse, as if he hadn’t used it for sometime, as if the last time he’d used it, it had been to scream and shout. She wished he would again now, anything was better than the oppressive silence that lingered over the castle.

“Harry...” she began, finding the words almost lodged in her throat, stuck fast, “Remus and Tonks...they’re dead. They died...”

“We all did.”

It sent shivers down her spine.

She’d heard the news, stuck in her hideaway alone, left clutching the baby as she waited for news. They’d said Harry had died. He’d gone into the forest and was carried out by Hagrid. Dead. She’d rushed at once to Hogwarts, not knowing what she’d find when she arrived.

She hadn’t known whether to dare to believe the whispers; that he’d somehow survived.

“So many people died Kitty...” he began, voice cracking, “so many...”

Kitty watched as he took a shuddering breath, trying to push away the darkness that was trying to overtake him. Harry squeezed his eyes shut, face creasing in pain until she reached out and pulled him towards her. He wrapped his arms around her almost desperately, burying his face into her body, clinging on like a drowning sailor.

She held onto him tightly, not saying a word and providing what little comfort she could as the tears fell. She knew that this would probably be the only time he would be able to release, the only time he could show how he felt before he had to face the world again, be the gracious hero. Everyone always expected him to be strong, to cope

with everything this war had thrown at him; they forgot he'd lost more than anyone else.

But now he was here. He'd survived. Her worst fears had not come true. He'd done the impossible and come back to her. She knew this was something he needed to recognise.

"Harry," she whispered, pulling away from him.

"Yeah?" he replied, dulled eyes staring back at her.

"It's over, you did it, you came back to me," she told him, fiercely, ignoring the salty tears glazing her own cheeks, "do you understand?"

It was a long time before he answered. She wondered whether he was carefully considering her question, or whether he was lost in other thoughts.

"How can it be over?" he asked her in a cracked voice.

She understood instantly what he meant; he'd been born into the war, lived his life by the war, she knew he'd always expected to die. He had, apparently...

"Riddle's gone. It's your life now. Our life," she said, smiling faintly, "and we're going to do everything we ever planned. We won't have to be apart anymore. We're going to go to Cornwall, we're going to be together. A year today we're going to be married. We'll get our own house, have kids of our own...We're going to grow old and wrinkly, together."

She watched him closely, trying to gauge his reaction. At first his expression was the same blank slate, but then he gave a brief flicker; a ghost of a smile, something that told her that deep down inside, Harry was still in there.

"I forgot places like Cornwall existed," he told her faintly.



“They exist for us,” she told him, running a hand down his cheek softly, “and only us. Harry, I know I’ll never be able to understand what happened here...but you know we’ll get through it. There will be a tomorrow. We’ll see the sun rise, together. Like we always said.”

He nodded heavily, dulled green eyes gazing off into the middle distance before suddenly focussing on her. He took in every detail of her appearance intently, as if seeing her for the first time. She wondered if she looked as different to him as he did to her.

“I thought about you every day,” he said with some difficulty, “I always wondered what you were doing; whether you were safe or whether you were thinking of me.”

“I did. I thought about you every day; every minute of every day. I prayed you’d come back, and you have.”

Again he smiled faintly. It made her heart lighter than she could have imagined possible only minutes before. It must have shown on her face because Harry, reached across, tucking her hair behind her ears.

“I love you so much Kitty,” he told her, green eyes now burning fiercely.

“I know,” she replied, shuffling closer, “I love you too, my victorious hero.”

Instead of warming him though, these words caused a dark shadow to pass over his face.

“It’s supposed to be some great victory,” he began, struggling to put into words how he was feeling, “so why do I feel like we lost? Why do I feel so...so lost?”

“You’re not lost,” she whispered, “you’re right where you should be, here with me.”

He didn’t seem to believe her, she got the feeling he hadn’t truly left the battle below, like he was still somewhere else. Frowning, she

reached out and ran her fingers softly down his cheek, relishing the feeling of a very real Harry Potter lying in front of her.

Leaning towards him she placed her lips against his, almost tentatively, feeling as if she would somehow damage him with the contact. At first he seemed unresponsive and as lost as he said he felt, but then something seemed to shift inside of him. Kitty felt him pull her closer, as if suddenly realised she was there and was desperate for the closeness they'd been denied the past years.

She responded eagerly, rolling over so that she was now straddling him, lying flat against his body and kissing him with all the pent up longing and desperation she'd felt during their long months apart. Harry's hands were running through her hair and roaming her body in a way that made her stomach flip.

She knew deep down that he was acting like this because he wanted to feel something, anything, other than what he was feeling right now. And she was glad to be able to help him. Anything to banish the image of her two friends bodies from her own mind.

This thought however seemed to act like a hammer to her fragile state of mind and she felt the horrified tears building up inside her, desperate to get out. Her head started to swim and it was with difficulty that she broke away from Harry, lips hovering inches over his as the dizzying spell passed. He gazed at her intently, not fooled by her act.

"Don't cry?" he asked, reaching up and smoothing his thumb across the salty tracks of her cheeks.

She gave a sniff, desperately trying to reign in her emotions.

"I can't...help it," she managed, trying to smile but feeling crippled by the sudden appearance of Tonks deathly face appearing in her mind, "I'm just...so happy...and so sad...How can this be the best and worst day of my life, all at the same time?"

“I don’t know,” he replied quietly, “I feel the same. When I feel happy it’s over I hate myself for it because of what’s happened, and when I’m sad, I feel...ungrateful. I came up here because I didn’t want to see anyone, no-one knows what to do or how to feel...”

She sniffed and nodded quickly, trying to hide her emotions. She wanted to be strong for Harry and failing miserably.

“You can be happy and sad, all at the same time,” she whispered to him, “for as long as you want. We can be happy and sad together...”

She pressed her lips lightly to his, the bittersweet kiss tasting of salty tears. She wondered if they could ever get over what had happened as a result of the war, she couldn’t even imagine how they were going to get through the rest of the day.

When she pulled away from Harry a second time she carefully brushed his fringe from his face once again, focussing intently on the action. She could feel his eyes following her every move.

“I missed you,” he said suddenly, voice sounding almost fierce. “I missed you so...so much. I thought I’d never see you again...I walked into that forest and I knew I was going to die. You were the last thing I thought of before...”

“Before?” she whispered, trembling despite the heat radiating off Harry’s body against hers, “Harry...what happened? Where did you go?”

He tore his gaze away from hers and she couldn’t help but shiver all the more, feeling the fear welling up inside her.

“I died...” he replied finally with some difficulty, “I went...somewhere else...and Dumbledore was there...he told me I had a choice...”

“What kind of choice?” she whispered in a horrified voice.

“To go...on...” he told her, “or to come back and finish it, once and for all.”

“And you came back,” Kitty stated, eyes swimming but feeling an immense sense of pride.

“I remembered what you said, the last time I saw you, that life was all about choices. So I made the right choice.”

She beamed at him, before leaning down and kissing him once more, so full of love and joy and pride that she thought her heart might burst. How many people could say they cheated death, twice? How many people died in the grounds that night she wondered, and how lucky for her that from the army of the dead he was the only one to come back.

“Did it hurt, dying I mean?” she asked him hesitantly.

“Not at all...Quicker and easier than falling asleep,” he said in a faraway voice.

She frowned deeply, not knowing what to make of this, or the sadness that was hidden in his voice. All at once the guilt at not being there for him, when he needed her the most, hit her forcibly.

“I wish I could have been here, to help you, I felt so useless...for the entire year I felt useless...”

“But you did help Kitty,” he told her, looking slightly surprised, “that night in the graveyard, when you saved me and pumped six bullets into Tom Riddle.”

“How was that supposed to help?” she asked him, “that was nearly two years ago, it didn’t hurt him then and it can’t have hurt him now...”

“When you shot him that night, his body died. The last scrap of soul left in him was haunting a corpse and he was weaker because of it. When we destroyed all his Horcruxes he had nothing left...he was a dead body walking and he died because of it. When I faced him that last time, it was inevitable.”

Kitty stared at him blankly.

“But...” she began in some confusion, “but you did it...”

“We did it,” he corrected her, “you and me, Ron, Hermione, Neville...”

“You’re kidding right?” Kitty asked him, still completely taken aback.

“I wouldn’t lie about something like this,” he told her seriously, “so you did help.”

“He’d been walking around in a dead body for two years?” she whispered, appalled at the thought.

“Who would know except for him? He looked inhuman to begin within, and his body was just a shell for his soul, made up of my blood, Wormtail’s hand and his father’s bones...Maybe he didn’t even realise?”

Kitty shuddered at the very thought of that corpse wreaking havoc on the country for so long. Perhaps it was only then that she truly realised what had just happened and what Harry had just faced. He’d died...

“Harry?” she asked in a faraway voice, “If you...came back, what’s to stop him doing the same?”

“Because I saw what he’d become, when I was in the other place, with Dumbledore. You don’t come back from that.”

She grimaced once more at the pictures in her imagination and stared at Harry with new eyes. Where had he been and what had he seen? Would she ever know? He could tell her perhaps, but she wouldn’t truly be able to understand, she’d want to, but she couldn’t.

She searched his eyes for a long time, having almost forgotten how brilliantly green they were, even when they were dulled with sadness.

She felt the great swell of pride once more leaned forwards, kissing him softly.

When she pulled away she leant her forehead against his, eyes still closed.

“I love you Harry,” she whispered, “more than yesterday, not as much as tomorrow.”

He gave a slight laugh and the sound was like music to her ears.

“I need to give you something back,” he told her.

She pulled back and he reached into the pocket of his jeans, pulling out something small and battered looking. He passed it to her and for a moment she could only stare at his bruised and bloodied hands.

“Open it,” he prompted.

It was a muggle photograph, folded tightly into a small square. With difficulty she managed to unfold it, coming face to face with her and Harry, looking two years younger and a lot less careworn than they did now. The picture was heavily stained and slightly charred around the edges and had obviously been much handled and seen better times. Flipping it over she saw her own handwriting.

“Come back to me,” she read out quietly.

She stared at it for some time, remembering writing those desperate words and every single day she’d spent before and after then, worrying about him, never truly believing her wish would be granted.

“You came back to me,” she said, tears swimming before her eyes.

“I came back to you.”

Without another word she wrapped her arms around him tightly, photograph still grasped in one hand. She didn’t know how long they lay there in Gryffindor dorm, all she could think about was how lucky

she was and how she couldn't wait for what was to come. She knew the path ahead would be difficult and painful at times, but now she had someone to be with her every step of the way, and it felt...manageable.

Eventually the utter exhaustion she'd been staving off since Tonks and Remus had disappeared from their flat the night before began to wash over her. Now all she wanted was sleep and finally she could with no thoughts and no nightmares to plague her.

As she drifted off she couldn't help but smile to herself, relishing the feeling of warm arms encircling her and protecting her. She snuggled back into Harry's chest, holding onto him tightly safe in the knowledge that he wasn't just there for her that night, but would be there for every night thereafter.

Together. Forever.

THE END

AN/ Ha ha! It says the end but in true HP style, tis not! We have an epilogue, and again in true HP style it was one of the very first things I wrote for this story!

I hoped you liked this monster chapter, a whole year in one!

## Epilogue

### Lightning Bolt Archives

Sometimes the light's all shinin' on me;

Other times, I can barely see.

Lately it occurs to me,

What a long, strange trip it's been.

Kaitlyn Potter pulled the gold silk glove further up her arm, desperately trying to gain some kind of order in her lavish outfit. She was stood in front of a large full-length mirror, critical eye running across her reflection; her long red gown was too tight across the bust and she was hoping no one would be able to notice the small stain near the hem where she'd spilt her coffee earlier. However, as she carefully arranged the mass of honey brown ringlets around her face, fixing them in place with gold chop stick she couldn't help feel a sense of a job well done.

She could scrub up well when she put her mind to it - even if she did feel something of a class traitor. The dress cost more than she'd lived off for a year when she was younger. But then again she thought, glancing at the reflection of her home, she could never have imagined that she'd end up living in a place like this.

Her eyes travelled to the photographs and pictures that covered the wall, each of them a happy memory captured forever, sandwiched behind glass to remind her of how far she'd come: A wedding picture, bride and groom grinning with confetti raining down around them, a sleepy head poking out of a tent, the Cornish coast stretching out behind him, a large group of people, bizarrely dressed and celebrating Victory Day.

She smiled to herself, picking up a picture of Ron and Harry in the official blue Auror robes, glasses of champagne in hand, celebrating graduation. They'd all come so far, risen above the death and destruction that had brought them together. Her eyes flitted to



another moving picture, this time Remus and Tonks waved back at her and her stomach clenched painfully.

Eight years on and it still hurt.

Before she could muse further upon her change in fortunes she heard the sound of something large and expensive smashing on the floor downstairs.

“That better not be what I think it is!” she shouted instantly, placing the photo back on the table.

There was a guilty silence and she sighed heavily. A quick glance at the clock told her they’d have to leave in ten minutes and she tried to calm her nerves, already jangling from the waiting. She stooped down, picking up the various clothes and robes off the bedroom floor, throwing them in the washing basket. Harry was about as untidy as Kitty was and she usually left the housework to him, he could flick a wand and have it done in moments after all.

It calmed the butterflies however so she continued her uncharacteristic cleaning spree, all the time keeping an ear out for more sounds of destruction from downstairs. She came across a sheaf of parchment strewn under the bed and she glanced at Harry’s familiar scrawl, as usual they were important documents that he’d forgotten to take into work.

She smiled to herself and put them on their desk, taking the time to screw lids back onto ink pots and bin half-eaten plates of food. She felt a familiar sense of pride as she looked around their beautiful home, admiring once again how easily they accommodated the muggle and the magical; a pen pot with quills and biros in, sheaves of parchments kept flat beneath pads of lined A4, wand polishing kit kept next to her paintbrush box.

Another glance at the clock told her she now had seven minutes to go and after taking one last look around their cluttered bedroom, she made her way downstairs. Sure enough, the expensive sounding breakage was what she’d feared; one of her own statues was lying in

pieces across the floor. She stepped over it gingerly and went in search of the culprit.

“I didn’t mean to,” came a small, guilty sounding voice from behind the sofa.

She sighed, staring sadly at the fragments but knowing full well Harry could fix it in an instant, “What have I told you about flying your broom inside the house?”

She rounded the sofa to find the young boy regarding her with disconcertingly grey eyes and a face pulled into a frown of almost chronic injustice. There was a miniature Asteroid 360 on his lap.

“Uncle Harry said I could if I was careful...” he tried.

“ No he didn’t Teddy!” Kitty exclaimed, before pausing and reconsidering, it was entirely possible that Harry would have said that.

Harry doted on Teddy as if he were his own son and Kitty knew exactly why. He was determined that Teddy would not grow up as he had, orphaned by Voldemort and not knowing anything about his parents and the magical world. This had meant that inevitably Harry had become the ‘fun’ uncle whereas she was the boring, bossy auntie.

She didn’t mind however, she loved Teddy as if he were her own too, she’d seen him grow from a tiny bump in her best friends stomach to the cheeky and caring boy of 8 now sat in front of her and she’d never regretted taking him in; they were godparents after all.

“Well, Harry shouldn’t have told you that,” she said, trying to look stern but failing miserably, “you know broomsticks are for outside only. Now, get your coat on.”

“But I don’t wanna go...”

Kitty gave a slight smile and crouched down so she was eye level with him.

“I know Teddy,” she told him sympathetically, smoothing his hair down affectionately, “but you know this is really important to Auntie Kitty right?”

“But it’s gonna be bo-ring,” he complained, pulling another face.

“I know, but all your aunties and uncles will be there, and you can play with Victoire,” she tried, “now how’s about you be a good boy for your poor worried auntie?”

“Am a good boy,” he muttered sullenly.

“But I thought we agreed you’d have brown hair tonight,” she said sternly standing up now and moving to the cloakroom.

“T’is.”

“Brown in places,” she remarked, staring at the little boy’s head for a moment, “what about all this green?”

Teddy merely broke into a wide grin, looking supremely pleased with himself. Kitty had to stop herself from being shocked at how suddenly the boy could remind her of his parents. That grin definitely had Tonks’ mischief all over it.

“Fine,” said Kitty airily, wrapping a gold shawl around her shoulder, “keep it green if you want Teddy – just no changing when we’re around muggles – you know the score.”

“Aye aye captain!” exclaimed the child happily, already dashing out of her bedroom and arriving back second later, with a backpack rammed full of things.

“We’re only going for a few hours,” she told him wearily, fully expecting him not to listen.

She was right, Teddy merely swung it over his shoulders and hurried over to the fireplace, looking so eager to jump in he was in danger of burning himself on the real flames.

“No floo tonight, trouble,” she told him, “Harry’s not back yet and you know I can’t use it on my own.”

“When’s Uncle Harry coming?” he whined already dropping onto the floor in what Kitty recognised as the ‘about to have a tantrum’ pose.

“Good question,” she muttered to herself, reaching for her mobile and hit speed dial.

It went straight to answer phone.

“Hi, Harry’s ignoring you right now, but leave a message and I’ll get right back to you.”

She sighed in frustration but waited for the beep anyway.

“What is the point in me getting you a mobile phone if you never turn it on? I swear to god Harry, I’m going to kick your arse if you’re even two minutes late tonight, get it? This is important! And wear a tie ok?”

She hung up, giving another irritated, yet nervous sigh. Teddy was repeatedly hitting the fire guard with a small, wooden hippogriff.

“Je-sus Christ,” she muttered, picking up her phone again.

After a couple of rings a familiar voice picked it up. She was too nervous to congratulate Hermione on being the only magical person capable of accepting technology.

“Hey Hermione,” she said quickly.

“Hi Kitty, you all set?” said the girl sounding slightly muffled, “We’re in the midst of a muggle clothing crisis over here!”

“Harry’s not back yet so I’m going to have to get a taxi,” she replied, before picking up a pillow and aiming it at Teddy’s head. The look of surprise as it rebounded harmlessly off him was enough to stop Kitty’s nerves for a second and stop Teddy hitting anything else.

“Teddy’s getting fed up too, I can’t really wait much longer...”

“I thought he was going back to yours after his shift, he said he was going to floo you,” she replied, before a sudden voice in the background suggested Ron was in trouble with some item of clothing.

“ Well that’s what he said, I’ve got his new suit here and everything...Goddamn it,” she muttered as she felt a wave of sickening nerves overtake her, “You don’t think he’s in trouble do you? Or hurt...”

“He’s probably just been held up Kitty,” Hermione soothed in such a long-suffering voice that it suggested this was a well practised conversation.

“He does know its tonight doesn’t he?”

“Of course! I saw him in the Ministry this morning and he sounded almost as nervous as you,” she laughed, “don’t worry, he’s probably been held up and is desperately trying to make it on time.”

“He will come won’t he?” she asked anxiously.

“Of course, why wouldn’t he?”

“He missed the last one,” she said in a small voice, hating herself for brining it up.

“Kitty, he was unconscious,” Hermione stated bluntly “You know what his job’s like, believe me, being the worried wife comes with the territory – I’ve lost count of the amount of nights I’ve sat worrying about Ron...Now don’t worry! He’ll be there, I promise. How are you feeling anyway?”

“Nervous as hell,” she breathed, glancing at her reflection once more, “what time will you get there?”

“At the rate Ron’s taking to put his tie on? Hours. But don’t worry, give us half an hour,” she said and Kitty could hear Ron’s moaning in the background again, “see you soon?”

“Yeah, ok,” she said.

“Good luck, bye.”

Kitty cancelled the call and was surprised to see her hands were shaking. Again to calm her nerves she hit speed dial.

“Hi, Harry’s ignoring you right now, but leave a message and I’ll get right back to you.”

She gave sigh.

“Harry,” she told the beep desperately, “please make it...”

She couldn’t think of anything else to say so she hung up abruptly. Gathering her bag and giving a last minute look into the mirror to tidy herself up, she turned to Teddy.

“Come on then, trouble,” she said, holding out her hand, “let’s go get a taxi!”

“Taxi!” exclaimed Teddy happily, abandoning his destruction of the fireplace and grabbing Kitty’s hand.

Kitty took great care when leaving the house. She locked all the muggle locks and activated all the spells Harry had put on the building by pressing the bricks around the doorbell in a complex pattern. Although it was years since they’d had their last Death Eater attack, Harry’s job didn’t exactly leave him short of a few enemies; people Harry had put away, those who wanted to carry on the ‘noble work’ of Tom Riddle, foreign spies and would-be assassins.

She cast another look across the door, looking to any muggle that walked past as if she were examining the wood grain – her job wasn't exactly a popular one with some magic folk either and she was just as likely a target as Harry.

Finally satisfied with the security arrangements, she took Teddy's hand and led them down the bustling London street. She soon flagged down a Hackney Carriage and settled herself and Teddy down for the ride. Despite his earlier reticence, he was now extremely excited about the evening and chattered away with the driver.

She stared out of the window anxiously, nibbling away at her previously beautifully manicured fingernails. She tried ringing Harry one more time but had no luck. She tried not to let this affect her too much and was desperately trying not to think about all the duels and monsters he could currently be dealing with when the taxi pulled up outside a large concrete building.

She scrambled out, paying the driver and pulling Teddy out behind her. She stared up at the edifice for a moment, which was dancing with colours as lights strobed backwards and forwards. She was more nervous than she thought she'd be.

"Is this your gallery auntie Kit?" asked Teddy, imitating her long stare up at the building.

"Yes it is Teddy," she said, crouching down in front of him and smoothing his hair down once more, "my very first one."

"It's pretty," he said with Remus-like sincerity, "you're really clever Auntie Kit, to do this."

She smiled sadly, wishing more than anything that Remus was here, leading Teddy and Tonks into her gallery, telling her how proud they were.

"You look sad," pouted Teddy.

Kitty gave him a big grin, "I'm not sad, trouble, just thinking about your mom and dad. Did you know, it was your mom that decided to send me to Art College? If it wasn't for her, we wouldn't be here now, at this gallery."

"She was really clever too, wasn't she?" asked Teddy, gazing at Kitty with solemn grey eyes filled with longing.

"She was," Kitty nodded, heart squeezing painfully, "and so was your dad. The cleverest people I ever knew."

"Cleverer than Auntie 'mione?" he asked incredulously.

"Even clever than Hermione," she agreed, "and braver than Harry, and funnier than Uncle George."

"That's not possible!" scoffed Teddy, obviously waiting for Kitty to reveal her joke.

"Of course it is," she said, before straightening up, "now, shall we go in?"

Teddy grabbed her hand and Kitty took a moment to compose herself. She squared her shoulders, hoisted her gloves back up towards her elbows and marched them in.

"Kaitlyn, dahling!" came the shriek as she walked through the doors.

"Suki, hi," smiled Kitty, as the outrageously dressed woman gave her three air kisses.

"And how is my little Teddy bear," cooed Suki, bending down and pinching his cheek.

Teddy brushed off her hand silently and gave her a long look. Kitty felt a pang of sadness again, that was such a Remus-like reaction it was uncanny.



“Why don’t you sit here and play before everyone comes?” Kitty told him, and after a haughty stare he set up shop of the sofa and investigated the contents of his rucksack.

“Dahling, simply everyone’s been dying to see you!” she gushed, grabbing hold of her elbow and dragging her into the main room, “Lord Elvin! Marcia from Debussy’s! Jean-Paul is around here somewhere too! And this is Crispin, he’s the art critic for The Independent!”

Kitty shook the man’s hand and was about to begin chatting when Suki pulled her off in another direction again, introducing her to what seemed like the entire room without stopping for more than a greeting. She was finally left to wander when the boisterous woman spotted something wrong with the canapés wandering past on the silver trays.

“I can’t tell you how much I’m looking forward to seeing your work,” came a smooth voice from behind her as she was half way through gulping down a glass of orange juice.

She spun around, coming face to face with the brilliant white smile of the art critic known as Crispin.

“Oh, well, thank you,” she said blankly, “I hope you like it.”

“I’m sure I will,” he said smoothly, “I must say, I’m curious of the title of your gallery - where does it come from?”

Kitty looked across to the sign he was referring to, the words Lightning Bolt Archives were etched onto a sheet of glass, behind which a light was slowly morphing from colour to colour.

“Oh, it’s a personal reference,” she said, giving a brief smile, “it’d take too long to explain.”

“Really?” asked the man, eyebrows raised, “Well I’m even more curious now...Tell me, what would you say are the main influences on your work?”

“My own life mainly and my friends,” she nodded, before quickly wondering where they were, “I don’t see the point of art for art’s sake unless it means something.”

“That’s certainly an interesting perspective,” nodded the man, sounding very much like he disagreed with her, “but *ars gratia artis*, is it not?”

Kitty merely forced a thin smile, carefully trying to hide her building annoyance. She hated doing this sort of thing, talking to the press and critics; it’s what she paid Suki for. She very rarely gave interviews or did promotional work and far from hurting her popularity as an artist, it had seemed to enhance it; now she was mysterious and kooky and an exclusive scoop was worth hassling her for.

“So Kaitlyn,” Crispin began, flashing his ludicrously white teeth at her once again, “when you say you’re influences are your own life, is there one aspect of it in particular?”

Kitty knew where this was going, she’d known since the man had first sidled up to her - these critics and ‘admirers’, they loved talking about her old life.

“No, not really,” she said, slightly coldly, trying to put him off further discussion.

“Only, I’ve noticed many themes in your earlier works, I wondered whether your relationship with your mother and your disturbed childhood was reflected in some way?”

Disturbed, she thought to herself, that was a new one.

“Read what you want to into my art,” she said offhandedly, looking around the room for an escape, “that’s the point.”

“Oh I do,” he told her, treating her to another dazzling smile, “tell me though, the recent court case involving your stepfather, were his allegations that you-”

“Ian is only interested in my money,” she said flatly, “and he’d say anything to get it.”

“Really? I heard that he implicated your husband in-”

“This has got nothing to do with my art,” she hissed at him.

“But it’s a fascinating diversion, is it not?” he batted back, quick as a snake striking, “I heard the final settlement was made out of court, nice and quiet, what was the final amount I wonder?”

“I’m not going to continue this conversation if you haven’t got anything of relevance to say. What goes on between me, my husband and Ian Banks is private and has nothing to do with this gallery or why I paint what I paint.”

“Does the fact you faked your own death at 16 have any bearing?” he cut in quickly.

“Fuck off,” she snarled, hands shaking, “write what you want you arrogant prick!”

She spun away, temper already rising – how dare he talk about Ian and her mother on this of all nights! Just then she caught sight of Hermione’s face in the doorway and rushed over, glad for the distraction.

“Thank God you’re here!” she said instantly, giving the girl a grateful hug, “I’ve been surrounded with posh gits in suits talking about how disturbed my life is and riling me up!”

“Glad we could rescue you,” she laughed, “your dress is amazing!”

“Thanks,” she said, nervously flattening it down, “hiya Ron, sorry to drag you out to something like this.”

“Are you kidding?” he said with a grin, before giving her a hug, “we’re really proud of you!”

Kitty merely grinned before giving a significant nod towards Hermione.

“How you feeling anyway?”

“Don’t ask,” she said with a roll of her eyes, “you try finding a decent dress to fit this thing.”

She prodded her belly which was so large she had balanced her purse on it momentarily.

“You look ready to pop,” commented Kitty with a grin as Hermione flinched.

“Don’t remind me,” she said sourly, “I tell you what Kitty, never have a baby – they make it look so exciting and easy in the books but it’s just uncomfortable, painful and downright embarrassing at times.”

“Ignore my wife,” said Ron simply, “she’s cranky because we’ve run out of peanut butter and treacle sandwiches.”

“I’m not cranky,” snapped Hermione, before pausing and smiling, “wow - guess I am. Anyway, cranky or not, I’m thrilled to be here, congratulations Kitty.”

“Thanks,” she said gratefully, before leaning down and addressing Hermione’s belly directly, “Now you listen here Rose Weasley – don’t you dare turn up tonight! You’re a Weasley so you better get used to being perpetually late and that includes for your own birth. I don’t think I can take any more stress tonight.”

Ron laughed and Hermione frowned at him, “You see what you’ve done? We’ve got a reputation for always being late now because you’re always faffing!”

“Not as late as Harry,” grinned Ron, happily passing on the buck.

“Good call Ron,” Kitty said, glancing up at the clock on the wall, “he promised he’d be here this time.”

“It wasn’t really his fault last time though,” said Ron in Harry’s defence, “he was in the middle of a battle with a-”

“Ron, what have I said about talking about you-know-what in places like this?” cut in Hermione, giving a meaningful look at the muggles around them.

“Oh yeah, right,” he said meekly, “forgot. Anyway, I’m just saying, last time it wasn’t necessarily his fault.”

“His fault or not if he doesn’t come tonight he won’t even be sleeping on the couch, it’ll be the garden for him,” she said, and both Hermione and Ron flinched, they’d seen enough of Kitty’s temper to know she’d probably go through with her threat.

More visitors began to pour through the door and Kitty grinned happily to see George and Angelina appear.

“You look...interesting,” laughed Kitty affectionately.

He was wearing a penguin suit complete with orange shirt and green bow tie.

“We thought we’d liven up your stuffy muggle do,” he added, receiving an elbow in the ribs from his wife at the mention of the magical world.

George merely rolled his eyes and Kitty hugged Angelina, complimenting her on her dress and swapping gossip. Her previous anger at the critic was evaporating and she slipped back into her world, leaving her muggle worries far behind.

“Uncle Ron!”

In a blur of green hair Ron was suddenly gripped by Teddy, who instantly began to show him his latest toys.

“You’ve been spoiling him,” Angelina noted with a slight smile.

“We can afford it, and he deserves it,” shrugged Kitty, “anyway, you guys hungry? There’s food walking about.”

She pointed out the various waiters who were wandering with champagne and canapés. They must have heard the call because one arrived almost instantly at Ron’s elbow, holding a plate temptingly in front of them.

“What are those?” Ron asked bluntly.

“Gruyere cheese and rocket bruchetta’s,” replied the waiter smoothly.

“Is that food?” Ron asked everyone and Hermione glared at him in annoyance.

“Fine, but I’m only eating it because I’m starving,” he muttered, lifting the tray out of the man’s hands and proceeding to dig in.

The little waiter looked lost for a moment, before backing away and rushing to get more supplies.

“It’s supposed to be one at a time,” sighed Hermione, picking up one of the small pastries up and nibbling it.

“But I’m starving,” said Ron plaintively as he picked up a handful, “we’ve had no dinner - you said there’d be food here Kitty!”

“I meant the kind of food that you usually get at jumped up, pretentious parties like this,” she told them, also collecting a few, “I personally wanted burgers but for some reason I was shot down on that one.”

They all laughed appreciatively and Kitty took a moment to study them all. There was something very robe-like about the suits, and in Hermione and Angelina’s case, dresses, they were wearing. The guys jackets were slightly too long and had suspiciously deep pockets whilst Hermione’s dress looked like a sleeveless dress robe.

She supposed you could take the wizard out of the robe but you couldn't take the robe out of the wizard, they seemed genetically hardwired for them.

She tuned back into the conversation just in time to hear alcohol being discussed.

"Its free," she informed them and a nearby tray was quickly commandeered and shared out amongst the group, "get as much as you can before they open up the gallery else you'll be left stone cold sober and facing that lot."

She nodded over to the huddles of art critics, artists and various other media folk that were circulating the room like vultures, all deep in arty type discussions; no doubt about how damaged she was or how much her stepfather had bled them for.

She wondered momentarily whether Harry would be as restrained as she had been if he were asked similar questions and decided it was a definite, resounding no. There'd be a pair of smoking shoes where Crispin stood. Kitty knew that Harry hated Ian even more than she did, if that were even possible. As her thoughts swirled around her husband she felt a familiar twist of nerves.

"Have you seen Harry?" she asked them finally, unable to hold it in any longer.

"He's on his way," George informed her, "bumped into him at the Ministry about an hour ago - just come back from a raid or something."

"And he asked especially to have the afternoon off," said Hermione tersely, "honestly, he lets them walk all over him..."

"I'll walk all over him if he doesn't turn up, again," she said, trying to sound threatening but she was obviously too worried because they all looked at her sympathetically.

“He’s just trying to lighten Gawain’s load,” Ron shrugged stuffing another vol-au-vont into his mouth, “he’s not going to stick around forever and everyone knows Harry’ll be Head of the Department when he goes.”

“Really?” asked Kitty, momentarily side-tracked, “What about the older guy, what’s he called? Caleb.”

Ron merely shrugged, obviously he had the inside knowledge, “The grapevine says Harry.”

Kitty wondered how she felt about this; Head of the Department was a big job, a dangerous job, but then again, there’d be more people to delegate work to and how better to change the department and the ministry than from the top.

“They’d be mad to consider anyone else,” George was saying.

“He’s addicted to danger that man,” Kitty half-joked, glancing at the door.

A steady trickle of people looking slightly anxious and wearing robe-like suits and dresses were trickling in now and she waved to a few of them in greeting. She noticed a few friends from college and the muggle world too, it gave her a warm feeling in her stomach to know she had so many people she could rely on.

Harry had to be here tonight she told herself forcefully, he just had to. It was a big night in so many ways.

“Well, it doesn’t matter if Harry is going to be the next Head or not, even management deserves time off,” said Hermione, sharing a worried look with Kitty, “he asked for it off!”

“He told me to tell you that he promised he’d be here no matter what,” said George helpfully, “he was getting changed in the toilets when I saw him.”



“You saw him getting changed in the toilets?” asked Ron, grinning just as a sudden yelp caught all there attention.

“Auntie Kit!”

Kitty spun around to see a toddler bounding through the crowd towards her, silvery blond hair dancing. She grinned widely, bending down to scoop up the girl and spin her round.

“Auntie Kit, mama bought me a bonne chapeau!” burbled the small girl, tilting her head side to side like a supermodel so she could admire her new hat.

“That is a belle chapeau,” agreed Kitty in a poor attempt at French.

“Bonsoir Kitty.”

She lowered the little girl to the floor and hugged Fleur happily, before catching sight of Bill and treating him to the same. Again, they had both missed the essential muggleness of the dress code, but looked effortlessly styled in their robe-like outfits. Kitty doubted that Fleur would look bad even if she were wrapped in a bin liner.

“Sorry we’re a bit late,” Bill said, glancing around the packed room, “did we miss anything?”

“Nah, still waiting for everyone to turn up,” she said, gazing around the room, “including Harry.”

“He’ll be here” he said with a smile, “now where’s the free booze?”

Kitty merely laughed and directed him to the nearest waiter. She gazed towards the door anxiously, wondering whether she should try and ring Harry again, when Hermione turned up at her elbow.

“He’ll be here,” she promised handing her a glass of wine, “you know he wouldn’t miss this for the world.”

“Yeah...” she sighed, carefully depositing the glass back onto a nearby table, “I know...”

“I like the name by the way,” said George suddenly, nodding the glass sign above their heads.

“Lightning Bolt Archives,” read Hermione, “wow, that’s ambiguous enough, but nice - does Harry know?”

“No, it’s a surprise,” she said vaguely, still watching the door, “speaking of which, there’s one for each of you inside.”

“Oh no, you haven’t painted a portrait of me have you?” asked Ron in horror.

“Don’t worry,” she said as everyone laughed at his expression, “I couldn’t possibly capture on canvas what nature has done to your face.”

Even he had to laugh at this and after a few more minutes of banter, Fleur came rushing over to them, hand clamped around Teddy’s, who was looking slightly shamefaced and wearing Victoire’s new hat.

“Kitty, there is a problem with ‘is ‘air again,” she said worriedly.

Kitty sighed before sneaking a peak under the brim of the hat, “What colour are we now?”

“Blue!” he yelped, with a clap of his hands.

“He’s feeling a bit multicoloured today,” she explained to the rest of them, “won’t stay as one shade for more than five minutes, even though he promised.”

Sure enough, as Kitty watched the blue hair suddenly began to darken until it was bright red.

“Oh well, you’ll fit right in with all these arty types,” Kitty told the boy, who merely pulled off Victoire’s hat and put on his own day wear hat from his rucksack, “they like weird hair.”

“Yours looks nice by the way,” Hermione said, as if noticing her for the first time.

“Nice and expensive,” muttered Kitty, still staring avidly at the door, “where is he?”

“Kitty, if he’s late for this then you know it can’t be his fault,” George assured her, picking up another tray of nibbles, “you know, these aren’t half bad.”

“Hmm,” she agreed half-heartedly, before checking the clock, “listen, I better go and just check everything’s ok before it opens...if you see Harry...well, tell him I’m looking for him.”

Ron and Hermione watched Kitty move through the curtain that was hanging in front of the gallery.

“He better have a good reason, that all I can say,” laughed Ron, shaking her head, “honestly those two...one drama after another.”

“Understatement of the century,” murmured Hermione, “just for once I’d like a week to go by when we didn’t have any worries...”

“She’ll be ok once he gets here, she’s just nervous,” Ron said, before pausing and shouting, “TEDDY! Don’t you dare do that!”

The boy stopped in his attempts to pull the tablecloth out from underneath the small buffet and spun guiltily, face radiating innocence.

“Go play with Victoire, and keep out of trouble!” he cautioned.

Teddy grimaced but did as he was told.

“This is fantastic though, isn’t it?” asked Ron, looking around the room when the commotion had died down, “a real achievement.”

“Yeah, to think its been ten years since she turned up - and now opening her own art gallery,” she said, shaking her head in amazement, “it feels like a lifetime ago, doesn’t it?”

“It was really,” shrugged Ron, “do you remember how much we hated each other when we first met, how we’d argue and fight at every opportunity.”

“I know, I still feel guilty about it now,” Hermione admitted, “do you remember how she was nearly obliterated by Moody and Kingsley, and then when we weren’t sure what was going to happen to her? I was sure she was going to disappear, live a ruined life...”

“Its all down to Tonks and Remus really,” Ron replied, note of sadness in his voice, “for giving her a home, sending her to art college - if they hadn’t helped her then, who knows what would have happened to her.”

“They were good people,” she nodded, watching Teddy play with a far away look in her eyes, “but I think we all know it’s Harry who kept her on the straight and narrow - and Kitty herself, for putting her mind to something.”

Ron was about to reply when a commotion at the doorway revealed the missing guest. Harry had obviously been running, his cheeks were red and his tie wasn’t even fastened yet. He skidded to a halt in front of the group, his face a picture of worry.

“Where is she?” he gasped, still quite obviously out of breath and forgoing all pleasantries.

“She’s gone in to check everything,” Hermione replied, as everyone else joined them.

“Is she pissed off?” he asked worriedly, running his fingers through his wild hair.

“Of course she is,” she replied in a sharp tone, “where have you been?”

“Ministry,” he said breathlessly, “Do I look ok?”

“Come here,” sighed Hermione, beckoning him forward.

She began to do up his tie, tucking his shirt into his suit and straightening everything up. Harry hopped from foot to foot, looking impatient as she brushed some invisible dust off his shoulders.

“What was the big emergency?” asked Bill curiously, “You were supposed to be on leave.”

“Oh you know,” he said vaguely, craning to catch a sight of Kitty, “the usual, some guy who can’t understand that unforgivable curses really does mean unforgivable.”

“You’ve been duelling?” demanded Hermione as he dodged her attempts to further mess with his hair, “Again?”

“Only a little,” he shrugged, obviously thinking this was a minor piece of news, “It is my job you know.”

“You’ve got blood on you,” noted Ron, motioning to his temple.

Harry brushed it away wordlessly, “Have I missed all the speeches?”

“No, they’re about to start,” she said finally, giving up on her failed grooming attempts and stepping back to admire her handiwork.

“Are you sure you’re ok Harry?” asked George, peering at him closely, “You don’t look too hot.”

“Slightly dosed up,” he shrugged, fingers already re-ruffling his hair, “the Healer said I should-”

“Healer?” demanded Hermione incredulously, “You got hurt?”

“It’s nothing,” he told her.

“But,” she began, before Ron cut her off.

“He’s fine Hermione,” he cautioned, “anyway Harry, you better go and-”

But Harry had already disappeared behind the red curtain into the gallery.

“-fetch her,” he finished lamely.

They watched the silent, unmoving curtain for a moment, expecting at any time to hear the familiar shouts start, but there were none.

“I don’t know about you lot, but I thought he wouldn’t make it,” laughed Ron finally, “again.”

Hermione merely rolled her eyes, “He’d be mad to miss this, and stupid to be duelling tonight as well!”

Meanwhile, Harry was hurrying through the twisting corridors of the art gallery. It was strange to see the works of art and sculptures that were usually scattered about the breakfast table or the bathroom floor now in gilt frames or behind velvet ropes. He was similarly shocked to see the bowl he’d been using for his cereal the past few weeks was actually supposed to be part of a sculpture and now had a price tag of £230.

He finally found Kitty standing in front of a large shape, hidden beneath a white dust sheet. He hurried over to her anxiously.

“Kitty,” he began breathlessly, “I’m so sorry I’m late.”

“So, the wanderer returns,” she said, spinning around hands on hips, “seven on the dot I told you – on pain of death I told you! I was waiting for you!”

“I know, I’m sorry! I tried,” he pleaded with her anxiously, “it was an emergency...”

She gave an annoyed frown and took in his scruffy, flustered appearance.

“What’s wrong?” she asked him suspiciously, “You look sick.”

“I’m fine,” he told her, spreading his arms as if to show her.

She stared at him for a long moment and Harry waited for her verdict. He thought he’d got away with it until she gave a deep, unhappy sigh.

“You’ve got blood on you,” she said flatly, beckoning him forward, “come here.”

She took out the small handkerchief that was stuffed in his pocket and wiped his neck in silence.

“I don’t want to know,” she told him finally, looking up at him, “just tell me you’re ok?”

“I’m ok,” he reassured her.

“Liar,” she scoffed with a worried frown.

Wordlessly she set about straightening his jacket, ruffling his hair once again and picking imaginary pieces of fluff off his shoulders. Harry guessed it was a girl thing, didn’t they realise he’d never be tidy and well presented?

“Why can you never get ties right?” she asked the world in general, pulling it off and retying it slowly, “around the tree and down the rabbit hole, remember?”

Harry knew she was only nagging because she was horribly nervous so he merely withstood her brutal assault on his appearance, occasionally making pleading apologies for her forgiveness. If there was one thing he'd learned from seven years of marriage, it was that Kitty was always right (even if she wasn't in full possession of the facts).

"Ok," Harry told her calmly, reaching up and taking hold of her wrists, "you're never going to get me looking any tidier. Now calm down."

"I am calm!" she exclaimed loudly, before giving a slight look of shock, "oh...guess I'm not."

Harry smiled, "There's nothing to worry about – you know for a fact that this is the best art you've ever produced. It's so good in fact that you've opened up your own gallery Kitty – your own gallery! Now, that room back there is full of snobs and critics and every sort of media shark you hate because they all love your work, and they're going to give you an award to prove it. So believe me when I say there is nothing to worry about. The hard bit's already done."

Various emotions flickered across Kitty's face the usual of denial, surprise, happiness and fear, before she took a deep, shaky breath.

"You're right," she told him quietly, "I can relax, I've got to relax..."

He gave her an encouraging smile before bending down and placing a light, sweet kiss upon her lips. When he pulled away the old Kitty was back, eyes dancing with mischief and fun – he suddenly found it incredible that he'd known her for so long, ten whole years...she still looked like the girl who at 15, sat by him on the bus and struck up a conversation about the weather.

"I'm so glad you made it," she whispered emotionally, "I'm not really as angry as I made out...just relieved."

"I know," he grinned, brushing his fingers across her cheek tenderly, "if you were really angry you'd have used my middle name."



She gave a laugh and Harry wrapped his arms around her and pulled her into a tight hug. She laid her head on his shoulder and gave a contented sigh.

“I love you Harry.”

Again he grinned, “You weren’t that worried were you?”

“I knew you’d make it,” she said, avoiding the question somewhat, “I just realised I hadn’t said it for a while. Because I do, love you I mean, more and more every day.”

He smiled happily as she pulled back, hands slipping down to her waist.

“Love you too,” he murmured.

Kitty gave a contented sigh and Harry closed his eyes, savouring the moment. They were both so busy these days he couldn’t remember the last time they’d just stopped. She must have been thinking the same thing because she was suddenly drawing back and fixing him with an excited expression, electric blue eyes dancing.

“Let’s just go home?” she suggested, moulding her body against his, eyes alight with mischief.

“And miss your big night?” he laughed incredulously, “after all the years of effort and weeks of nagging? Not likely.”

“Oh come on,” she begged, smiling seductively, “just you and me? We could go to bed early, make our own entertainment?”

“Mmm tempting,” he told her, fingers caressing her spine lightly, “and as much as I would love to, I know you’re just doing this because you’re nervous. Now, you’re going to listen to your speeches, do your own, unleash everyone on your work, drink too much champagne and then we’re gonna go home, just you and me.”

She pouted and Harry grinned once more, almost tempted to take her up on her offer there and then.

“No,” he warned her, against his better judgement.

“You’re a harsh master to follow, Mr Potter,” she complained, smile still dancing across her lips.

“And you’re a difficult mistress to control, Mrs Potter,” he retorted to her amusement, “Now are you ready to do this, it’s nearly time to get started.”

“No,” she whispered honestly.

“You’re going to be amazing,” he promised, “you already are. I’ve got complete faith in you.”

Kitty smiled despite herself and Harry took her hand.

“Got faith in you too,” she reminded him as he pulled her towards the entrance to the gallery, “Ron said they’re thinking of making you Head of Department.”

He shot her a brief look of surprise before giving a slight shrug.

“I’ve spoken to Gawain about it and I’ve got some big ideas...but not just yet. Next year maybe, when he retires. Besides, I’ve got enough on my plate as it is at the moment.”

“Ministerial reforms getting you down?” she teased, “Surely the great Harry Potter isn’t admitting that work’s getting the better of him?”

“No! More like dealing with three months of you pacing until the small hours, turning every room in the house into a studio and making me pose for your sculptures,” he replied easily, wrapping his arm around her waist as they walked.

“Oh, I’m so sorry!” she laughed incredulously, “At least all you have to do is clean paint of my clothes, not blood! Maybe I’m pacing because I’m worried about you!”

“Yeah right! Does this worrying about me include muttering to yourself about paint colours?”

Kitty merely shook her head with a laugh, before growing serious; she could hear the buzz of the crowd beyond the curtain and obviously didn’t want to go any further. She stopped and turned to him with a thoughtful look on her face.

“Joking aside, you should take the job, when they offer it to you,” she told him, tidying his tie and shirt once again, “you deserve it. That place was rotten to the core when you started, it was you that dragged it into the light and made it what it is today. You should be proud.”

“I am, we’ve got a good team,” he told her, looking slightly surprised, “I would have thought you’d have hated the idea of me being promoted.”

“Is that why you didn’t tell me?” she suggested shrewdly.

“Maybe...I guess I thought you had enough to be dealing with yourself right now.”

He wondered briefly whether Ian Banks’ ugly head was about to rear itself into the conversation and he guessed the same thought had occurred to Kitty. However, she seemed as keen as he was to gloss over that part of their life.

“I’m just glad I can leave the gallery to do all my muggle business and focus on Ministry work, I hate all this publicity, art-critic stuff,” she said with a frown, “please can we just go home?”

“No, come on Kitty, you deserve this, enjoy it!”

“I can’t! I’d rather enjoy you at home.”

“Later,” he grinned, planting a quick kiss on her unresisting lips, “Now come on, let’s get a quick drink with the guys before Suki finds you-”

No sooner had he said this however, than the curtain was ripped aside and the aforementioned PA bustled over to them.

“Kaitlyn, dahling!” she cried exuberantly, “There you are! We’re ready to start! I’ve been looking for you simply everywhere!”

She gave Harry a pleading look, “Can’t we just get out of here? Go home?”

“This is you’re big moment Kitty,” he said encouragingly, “enjoy it!”

“Listen to your beau Kaitlyn dahling!” Suki admonished and Harry grimaced, he hated her calling him that, “This is your time to shine! Now chop chop! Remember nice clear pronunciation! Stay away from the controversial topics! Don’t let Eddington embroil you in a political debate! And please, please, please don’t forget to mention our sponsors this time! I’ve written your speech down for you here...”

And with a final pleading look thrown across her shoulder at him Kitty was led towards to small dais at the front of the room.

“Harry, dahling!” mimicked George at his elbow, grimacing at the women now harassing Kitty’s hair.

“Don’t,” Harry warned, “I get enough of her coming over the house every hour godsend! Kaitlyn, listen to your beau, blah blah blah!”

“Why does Kitty put up with her?” asked Hermione incredulously.

“Because she’s brilliant at her job,” Harry said sulkily, hands rammed in his pockets now, “I wouldn’t mind but she arrives so unexpectedly, and you know what the house is like...”

Everybody nodded wisely. Kitty had a penchant for magical gizmos that were next to useless and cluttered every surface with the things. Harry wouldn't mind, but he had to keep fixing them or casting spells on them whenever they broke down, which was often. It made receiving muggle visitors a constant problem.

"Come on, let's get a good view," suggested Ron already barging past the incredibly dressed visitors with a glass of free champagne in each hand.

Hermione sighed and followed him until they were all positioned in front of the raised area. Harry got his first look at the name of the exhibition.

"Lighting Bolt Archives," he murmured, smiling faintly as his fingers unconsciously touched the scar on his forehead.

It hadn't troubled him for eight whole years.

"Cool name huh?" asked Ron appreciatively.

Harry nodded and was about to say something when Suki clapped her hands with a faint jingle of jewellery and walked up to the microphone. She began to call everyone to attention in her usual florid style and soon the noise volume lessened.

"Ladies, gentlemen, esteemed members of the art community!" she began gracefully, "Welcome one and all to the official opening of the Lightning Bolt Archives!"

There was a murmur and a polite clapping of hands from the general crowd. Harry felt more people crowding in behind him and he guessed they were Kitty's friends and co-workers from the Ministry.

"Now as you all know, we are here tonight for two reasons! The first is to officially open the first permanent exhibition space dedicated to the work of the brilliant artist Kaitlyn Potter-" here everyone clapped politely whilst Harry, George and Ron whistled and whooped, "and the second, is to reward her dedication and extraordinary

achievements with a special award! With more on this award, and how Kaitlyn came to be nominated for it, I hand you over to the utterly fabulous Marco Coco, sponsor of this gallery!"

More clapping and Harry and Ron shared a look which plainly said, 'disengage brains for 15 minutes'. Sure enough Marco Coco (or The Money as Kitty called him) was an elderly gentleman bedecked in an orange suit of dubious fashion who could talk for England. Kitty called him The Money because he'd been her patron for nearly nine years and, as Kitty put it, had more money than sense.

He could tell he wasn't the only one struggling to listen to the dull drone of The Money's voice as he detailed the history of the award Kitty was getting. It was full of references to artists he didn't know and drew occasional appreciative titters and nods from the assembled critics for what seemed like terrible jokes.

The various children that had accompanied Kitty from the magical world had already decided to begin a vicious game of seek and destroy. Soon small biscotti's and hors d'oeuvres were flying through the air behind them. Even Kitty had a faraway look on her face. He persevered though, intrigued to find out how the muggle world saw Kitty.

"I first came into contact with Kaitlyn's work during a trip on the London Underground, the Oxford Line to be precise. The mural I found there was simply the most beautiful piece of guerrilla art I had ever seen and knew at once I had found someone special."

"Guerrilla art?" whispered Ron questioningly.

"Subversive," Harry replied with a grin.

"Illegal," muttered Hermione, with a roll of her eyes.

He remembered vividly Kitty's penchant during her first few years of studying, of sneaking off and 'improving' walls, pavements and benches. It'd had been during the war and in particular the year of separation they'd faced whilst he was hunting the Horcruxes with Ron

and Hermione. Of course, everything she'd done had an anti-war message, such as Phoenixes on sites of old Death Eater attacks, but the muggles were oblivious to that. He remembered stumbling across just such a message after four months of being on the road unable to contact her. The image of the lightning bolt painted into the middle of a road was burnt into his mind forever; it had spoken of hope during the darkest days.

Harry knew it had always amused Kitty that she'd been seen as a trail blazer for this guerrilla art form, when the muggles didn't even understand that it wasn't about art at all, or being subversive and 'sticking it to the man'. It had been to show hope and community and the only way she could make her views known when she was in hiding herself and being hunted by Death Eaters and Ministry workers alike.

“... she graduated with distinction after a year's sabbatical for personal reasons and began a series of high profile commissions, including the creation of the statue to mark the memorial of the 17 people that died in the Harringate Disaster.”

It was no disaster, Harry thought grimly, it had been a Death Eater attack on a muggleborn's hide-out.

“...always somewhat reclusive, Kaitlyn has shied away from the limelight shed on her by her peers and the art community, but has tirelessly campaigned to raise awareness for many noble causes,” the man was saying, “the Women's Shelter Scheme, rehabilitation and counselling for young offenders and of course, as her role as patron to the Youth Arts Foundation.”

Harry smiled to himself, thinking back to Kitty's mother and her childhood, back to a different Kitty who'd stole, who'd sell drugs, who carried a gun around; the Kitty he'd fallen in love with all those years ago He'd always supposed her muggle charity work had been to make amends in some way for her past but he'd never stopped to ask.

“And so we come to the present day, which see's Kaitlyn's dream come true; this is the first of many galleries I am sure,” said Marco

warmly, “and I’m sure she will continue to work as hard as she does, putting us to shame with her talent and good deeds. And that is why the Arts Council has granted this year’s prestigious Outstanding Contribution to Artaward to Kaitlyn Potter, an example to us all.”

Harry was the first to begin clapping, quickly followed by his friends and the muggles in the room. Kitty was blushing and was sat stock still, staring at her hands. The man stepped aside and Suki reappeared, still clapping enthusiastically.

“Thank you Marco for such a fantastic description of your fabulous award!” she twittered happily, “and may I just say, I agree with you completely on Kaitlyn’s early guerrilla work! I myself own one of the very early pieces Kaitlyn created when she was just 17, the Phoenix From The Ashes from Soho Square, and was quite astounded at the recent valuation of it!”

Harry grimaced, sharing a frown with Hermione. Soho Square was the scene of the notorious Death Eater attack which left Tonks’ father and his friend Dirk Cresswell dead. Kitty had painted the phoenix for Tonks, who had visited the site only once before her own death.

It was difficult to imagine Suki enjoying it for a completely different reason, unaware of its true meaning. But then again, Kitty was always telling Harry that that was the point, that art could mean different things to different people. What had always made Tonks cry could be the same thing that made Suki smile.

“Anyway, that is beside the point! I shall hand you over to the person that will be presenting the award – award winner himself, Nile Denman!”

Harry looked up in surprise, recognising the name. It was Kitty’s old college lecturer from London – she’d spoken of nothing but him after she’d started; mostly about how much he annoyed her and argued with her, which she secretly loved. She mustn’t have known that he was attending because now she cast a delighted look at the man weaving through the crowd, sad thoughts of Tonks seemingly forgotten.



When he reached the dais he gave Kitty a big hug and said something to her that made her laugh, before turning to the podium and placing a small gold statue on it. The clapping died down and Nile regarded them with twinkling blue eyes for a moment.

“Good evening class,” he quipped, causing Kitty to stifle a laugh, “If you’d have told me ten years ago that I’d be standing here, in front of what seems like England’s entire population of art critics, handing out this award, to this girl, I’d probably have laughed in your face. Not because Kaitlyn was quite honestly the most dreadful student I’ve ever had to suffer, but because I didn’t think I’d have the stomach to stand here looking at you all: the single biggest threat to individual art in this country.”

This didn’t quite seem to be the start to the award giving that the assembled art critics had been expecting, and they made various noises of outrage and anger. Kitty however, didn’t seem to be hurt by his comment about her; instead she was trying desperately not to laugh. Ron and Hermione both turned to Harry with a shocked expression on their faces but he merely shrugged and gave them a grin; he remembered meeting the man for the first time and being similarly incensed.

“Thought that’d get your attention,” laughed Nile, “now I’ll tell you a little story. Ten years ago, only days before the new term started at the London School of Art and Design, I get foisted a last minute applicant. A girl with no artistic experience, who had failed to turn up to her GCSEs and demanded a place at the most prestigious college in the country; what we in the business like to call a no-hoper. Naturally, I took her on straight away and instantly regretted it.”

“Having no artistic experience meant she thought she knew better than me, and quite frequently told me so. She constantly failed assignments, got into trouble for being disruptive and fundamentally failed to understand that critics and journalists such as yourselves tell us what art is, not the artist.”

Behind him, Kitty gave a snort of laughter which quickly transformed into a cough.

“I see she still agrees with me on some things then. Now you might think I’ve described the worst student in the world, and you’re right, she was. But she was also the best artist I have ever had the misfortune to train. Some people don’t need to be taught art, because they know it instinctively. It’s what we in the business like to call a natural.”

Harry grinned widely, that was almost exactly what he remembered telling her during their phone calls during his sixth year; that it didn’t matter that everyone else had gone to private schools or that they had the best equipment. She had a gift that did need to be taught, just polished.

“She constantly failed assignments because the assignments given to her were too pretentious and conceited. She got into trouble for being disruptive because she dared to say that art shouldn’t be written into a syllabus and that money couldn’t buy talent. She refused to play the game, and yet here she is, standing in front of you receiving the award.”

“As with anything Kaitlyn does, you get the feeling she always knew this was going to happen, and probably wouldn’t stop bugging people until it did. But I caution you to not underestimate this woman. Use your soul to study what lies behind those doors, not your brains. Because, as with anything Kaitlyn does, there is a lot more going on beneath the surface than she’ll ever say. I have followed her career very closely and have seen some incredible things lurking in her paintings.”

Harry was slightly taken aback at the man’s insight and he could tell Kitty was too. She gave him a momentary look of surprise mingled with fear.

“So I can think of nobody better to give this award to, than Kaitlyn Potter,” said Nile suddenly, obviously having felt he’d said his piece, “The girl who was told to draw still life and came back with a pocket

watch, disembowelled on a board. The girl who copied Van Gough's Sunflowers onto the back of a seed packet and got away with it. The worst student in England, who dared to be its best artist."

The critics didn't seem to like this too much but that didn't matter because the noise coming from Harry and his friends was enough to drown them out. They clapped wildly, cheering and whistling as a laughing, smiling Kitty accepted the award from her mentor. Suki seemed at a loss of what to do and Harry guessed it wasn't in her action plan for the award giver to ritually humiliate the audience and the winner.

Kitty however, solved her dilemma by stepping up to the podium herself and placing the award back onto it, satisfied smile on her face.

"Well, how do you follow a speech like that?" she said cheekily, catching Harry's eye and giving a wink.

He guessed the nerves that had been plaguing her for weeks had now evaporated.

"Thanks Mr D," she laughed, "Now I remember why you used to wind me up so much. I wasn't actually a bad student you realise, he was just a bad teacher."

A few of Kitty's class mates and friends must have been present because there was suddenly whistles of agreement and Harry grinned appreciatively.

"But seriously now," Kitty began, looking down at the award, "thank you so much for this. I don't suppose any of you will ever understand what it means to me..."

She trailed off, seemingly lost in her own thoughts momentarily, before clearing her throat importantly and picking up a sheaf of cards from the podium, "Erm...I do actually have a few people I want to thank for tonight. My patron, Marco Coco, of course for his generosity, and also to the Arts Council-" Kitty frowned at the cards for a long moment, before giving a sigh and looking up, "do you know what? If

you want to know what I'm supposed to say you can read these later."

She chucked the cards onto the podium and Suki gave a panic-stricken look towards them, moaning under her breath.

"I'll take a leaf out of Mr Ds book and tell you a little story. I'm guessing from the amount of journalists here that you've obviously all read the papers recently and the 'shock revelations' of my past," she began, looking momentarily bitter, "so I'd like to set the record straight while I've got your attention and you can stop hounding me and my family. Maybe then you'll understand why I did what I did."

"Ten years ago I was living in a small flat in Crawley with my stepfather. He wasn't a particularly nice guy and my lawyer tells me he hasn't much changed. I never knew my real father and my mother had committed suicide a few years before. I'd spent much of my life living hand to mouth, and hating everyone for it. It's hard for people to imagine what it's like growing up in poverty and fear, and if you've never experienced it for yourself then you can't know what it feels like to be utterly powerless to raise yourself out of the gutter."

"I'm telling you all of this because I know you all thrive on this sort of information, because it's so fashionable to talk about damaged childhoods and broken homes – as if it somehow gives me credibility. But I want you to know that that girl has got nothing to do with me, she left a long time ago and nothing I do today is a product of that life. "

"I kicked the habit of being Catherine Earl ten years go today. On that day I got onto the 49a bus into town and met a stranger, who changed my life. He showed me things I would never have dreamed possible, both good and bad. He loved me like no one else had ever done before, or ever will, and taught me to do what's right, not what's easy. I doubt any of you can understand what it takes to believe in something so deeply and passionately that you're willing to give your life for it. But he did. And my friends did."

“You’ve probably never known one person in your life who has done that, but I’ve known many people, many friends, who aren’t here today for that very reason. It seems so pointless to be given an award to say well done for doodling when the world’s a little emptier without those people in it.”

“So instead of me standing here and thanking some rich old guy because he’s got more money than sense or pandering to critics and journalists who think they know me because of what they see me produce, I’m here to tell you where art comes from and who it belongs to. It comes from the heart and soul and it reflects sacrifice. And it belongs to my friends who died for what they believed in.”

“For Pops, who spent his life making up for the mistakes of his youth...For Fred Weasley, who could never have told enough jokes or made enough people happy...For Ginny Weasley, who was the strongest and bravest of us all, till the end...For Remus, who understood that everyone deserves a second chance...And for Tonks, who believed in me, and meant more to me than a sister or best friend could ever do...”

“I miss them all more than words can say and wish that they were here to see what they helped me achieve.”

The crowd watching Kitty were utterly silent. Either because they were confused, or because they too were lost in painful memories. Kitty however, had eyes for nobody else except Harry and he could see the raw emotion that hadn’t dimmed despite the long years. He guessed their generation would be a traumatised one, and that it didn’t matter how long ago it was or how far they’d come, they’d never quite be able to put what happened behind them.

“But life goes on...and although we’ve lost friends, we’ve gained family. And I’ve gained more family and friends in the past ten years that I could ever have dreamed possible sitting in that flat in Crawley feeling lost and alone.”

“ So I'll finish with my dedication. Lightning Bolt Archives is dedicated to Harry. Who is my best friend and my husband. My boy-who-lived and my chosen one. My everything.”

“Thank you for making it Harry.”

Harry was vaguely aware that everybody was clapping but he didn't pay any attention to that. He merely pushed through the crowds and ran up to Kitty, pulling her into a tight embrace, pressing his lips against hers. She had tears trailing down her cheeks unchecked.

“That was perfect,” he whispered to her.

“It needed to be said,” she replied in thick sounding voice, “if it wasn't for them I wouldn't even be here, I probably wouldn't be alive.”

Harry nodded silently, smoothing her hair down and gazing around the room – the critics and muggles seemed at a loss of what to do next, oblivious as they were to the effects of the magical war. In the end, Suki unceremoniously pulled the curtain aside for them to enter the gallery, then collapsed in a pile onto a nearby chair and ordered a large vodka.

One by one the room emptied of muggles until they could properly see the assembled witches and wizards for the first time. Although they'd lost many friends, she'd been right when she said they gained many more, Harry thought. There were all the various Weasley families, Molly and Arthur at the head, hair now grey and only flecked with vibrant red. Luna was there with her new boyfriend, both gazing admiringly at the large fish tank against one wall with Neville.

Kitty had many friends from the Ministry, where she worked with Hermione in the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, putting an end to pro-pureblood laws and muggle discrimination. She was the first muggle to ever work in the Ministry and her links with both the muggle and magical world made her extremely popular. Most of her Department seemed to be here tonight.

One by one, everyone came up to them and hugged Kitty, congratulating her achievement whilst dabbing red eyes and runny noses. Everyone seemed to be lost in painful memories but agreed that Kitty's speech was perfect. It was a mark of how awful the war had been, but everyone had been traumatised by it in some way, either by what they saw or what they did. A whole generation that were deeply scarred, and always would be.

Eventually they began to wander into the exhibition, until only Harry and Kitty were left. He led her over to a sofa and they sat down, she leaning against his chest, legs tucked up under her.

"You're supposed to be happy tonight," he said finally, frowning at her tears.

"I am happy," she replied, threading her fingers with his, "you don't know how it made me feel to look down from that podium and see all my friends staring back. I even imagined Tonks and Remus were here too, standing just beside you."

"I'm sure they were," he said, also feeling sad, yet strangely happy at the same time, "they'd have been so proud of you."

"I know."

Harry fell into his unconscious habit of fiddling with her wedding ring, thoughts travelling back to the moment he'd given it to her, all those years ago. They'd been young and impulsive and so different to what they were today. Yet he'd never once regretted it, not even for a second; their life had been one massive rollercoaster, with unbelievable highs, devastating lows, but somehow, they always pulled through.

"Can you believe it was ten years ago today that we met?" she asked him, thoughts obviously dwelling on the same thing.

"It seems like only yesterday," he said, "or a million years ago - makes you feel old doesn't it?"

“Yeah,” she agreed, “ten years ago, if I’d got to the bus stop in time, we wouldn’t be here. Weird thought.”

“If I hadn’t managed to sneak out of the Dursley’s...” he suggested, letting the thought roll out unspoken, “What do you think would have happened?”

“Who knows?” she replied, “I wouldn’t be here, that’s for certain.”

“You wouldn’t be a world famous artist? Adored by your fans, celebrated by your critics?” he teased.

She scoffed, leaning her head against his shoulder, “You wouldn’t be a world famous Auror? Saviour of wizard-kind? Adored by your fans, feared by your enemies?”

“You make it sound so glamorous,” he joked, but he knew she could hear the hint of seriousness in his voice too.

She gave a sigh and Harry wrapped his arms around her stomach, pulling her closer. He pressed his lips to her hair, once again the feeling of serenity washing over him. There was nowhere else he’d rather be, nowhere else he’d ever wanted to be.

“I heard a song on the radio this evening that made me think of you,” she said thoughtfully, “had the coolest lyrics.”

“Oh yeah?” he asked her curiously.

“Lately it occurs to me, what a long, strange trip it’s been.”

He gave a laugh and planted another kiss onto her hair, “Sounds about right.”

“Ten years,” she repeated in a far away voice, “I can’t believe how much everything has changed...all those people we met, everyone we lost...”



“I know,” he said heavily, “too many...”

“But do you know what? Despite everything, I would never have swapped it.”

“Me neither,” he replied.

She gave another heavy, yet contented sigh, and Harry hugged her even tighter.

“I’m so glad you’re here Harry,” she whispered emotionally.

“I told you I’d make it,” he said reassuringly, giving her a slight, affectionate jostle.

“Not just for tonight though,” she replied, “for every night...”

“I know, like I said, I told you I’d make it.”

Kitty gave a low laugh to this and he could feel the vibrations chasing up and down his own body. She opened her mouth as if to say something, but paused suddenly.

“What is it?” he asked, giving her slight squeeze.

Kitty sat up and turned to face him, unreadable expression on her face. Quite suddenly she leaned forwards and kissed him.

To him it was as exciting and exhilarating as their first kiss, as every kiss they’d had since. On this night of reminiscence, it spoke to him of their magical summer away from the whole world, when it had just been them together and nothing else.

He felt liked he could have stayed there forever, like there was no one else in the world except him and his one true love, his soul mate. He couldn’t help but grin at the thought and with a low chuckle she pulled away, resting her forehead against his and smiled at him now.

“I’ve got a surprise for you,” she whispered.

Harry stared into her eyes for a moment, there was something odd in her tone.

“In the gallery?” he asked.

“No, it’s right here, a work of art,” she said, pulling away from him and reaching for her purse, “I honestly think it’s the best thing I’ll ever do.”

He smiled at her faintly, curiosity piqued. She found what she was looking for and turned to him with an excited expression on her face. She paused momentarily and he had the feeling she was savouring the moment, before slipping something into his unresisting hand; a grainy black and white photograph.

He stared at it incomprehensively for a moment, before recognising it for what it was.

He was completely winded.

“It’s a boy,” she told him, beaming smile breaking across her face, “I think we should call him James Sirius.”

THE END

AN/

And that’s it. Over.

Do you know what’s really sad? I did a JKR and wrote this epilogue a few years back – it was heart wrenching going back to it and editing out three brilliant characters in Fred, Tonks and Remus. Just so you now, in my world they’d already had two kids (Troy and Atlantis) and we’re expecting a third and very happy.

It feels really strange to be saying goodbye to Kitty after four years of struggling on and off to write this. I feel like I know her really well and could bump into her myself on the bus into town. I’m going to miss

her, but they got their happily ever after and they'll still live on in not only my imagination but yours too!

See you around Kitty.